



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>





300057209T





A S I R E N .

BY

T. ADOLPHUS TROLLOPE,

AUTHOR OF "THE GARSTANGS OF GARSTANG GRANGE,"
"PAUL THE POPE AND PAUL THE FRIAR,"
ETC. ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.



LONDON:

SMITH, ELDER & CO., 15, WATERLOO PLACE.

1870.

250. y 187.

[The Right of Translation is reserved.]



CONTENTS OF VOL. III.

BOOK V.—*continued.*

WHO DID THE DEED?

CHAP.	PAGE
II. SUSPICION	3
III. GUILTY OR NOT GUILTY?	18
IV. THE MARCHESE HEARS THE ILL NEWS	33
V. DOUBTS AND POSSIBILITIES.....	51
VI. AT THE CIRCOLO AGAIN.....	70
VII. A PRISON VISIT	81
VIII. SIGNOR GIOVACCHINO FORTINI AT HOME	93
IX. THE POST-MORTEM EXAMINATION	110
X. PUBLIC OPINION	129
XI. IN FATHER FABIANO'S CELL	140
XII. THE CASE AGAINST PAOLINA.....	150

BOOK VI.

PŒNA PEDE CLAUDO.

CHAP.	PAGE
I. SIGNOR FORTINI RECEIVES THE SIGNORA STENO IN HIS STUDIO	169
II. WAS IT PAOLINA AFTER ALL ?	192
III. COULD IT HAVE BEEN THE AGED FRIAR ?	205
IV. WHAT RAVENNA THOUGHT OF IT	221
V. "MISERRIMUS."	234
VI. THE TRIAL	246
VII. THE FRIAR'S TESTIMONY	262
VIII. THE TRUTH !	271
IX. CONCLUSION	284

BOOK V.—*continued.*

WHO DID THE DEED ?

A S I R E N .

CHAPTER II.

SUSPICION.

THE Marchese Ludovico told the lawyer that he would go immediately to the magistrates and make a voluntary statement of all that he knew of the circumstances connected with Bianca's death ; and he fully purposed doing so. But he did not do it *immediately*. There was another visit which he was more anxious to pay ; and which the hint that had dropped from the old lawyer to the effect that it was very probable he might not pass that night in his own home, determined him to pay first at all hazards.

This visit, as may readily be imagined, was to Paolina. And to the modest little home in the Strada di Santa Eufemia he hurried as fast as his

legs would carry him, as soon as he quitted Signor Fortini. Paolina, on returning home after her conversation with the Contessa Violante in the Cardinal's chapel, had remained there busy with the preparation of her materials for beginning her work at Saint Apollinare on the following day.

She looked up as he entered the room with an arch smile on her lips and in her eyes which, perhaps, did not reflect altogether faithfully the feeling in her heart.

"Yes, I saw you, you naughty, inconstant boy, when you little thought my eye was upon you. I saw you with—— Ludovico, there is something wrong," she said, suddenly changing her laughing tone for one of alarm as her eye marked the expression of his face. "I am sure from the way you look at me there is something amiss. What is it, Ludovico mio? What has happened to vex you?"

"A great and terrible misfortune has happened, my Paolina; and I have run to you in all haste that you might not hear it from any lips but my own. You were going to say just now that you saw me with Bianca Lalli, were you not? Where and when did you see us?"

"In a *bagarino*, driving towards the Pineta. I was up at a high window in the church on the scaffolding prepared for my work," said Paolina, deadly pale, and breathless with apprehension.

"Ah! you saw us from the window. I took her there at her request to see the Pineta. We started on leaving the ball-room. In the forest she became sleepy: I left her sleeping on a bank, and meaning to return to her in a few minutes. I could not find the spot again for some time; and when I did find it she was gone. After searching the wood in vain for hours I returned to the city, and—at the gate—not an hour ago—I saw her brought in—dead!"

"Dead! La Bianca dead!" cried Paolina, much shocked; and with every vestige of the half-formed suspicions which had been tormenting her suddenly erased from her mind by the terrible tidings and the sadness of the end of the unfortunate Diva.

"Dead, my Paolina; and I am suspected of having murdered her," he said slowly, and with an accent of profound despair.

"What—*what!* You suspected! By whom? What does it mean? La Bianca murdered—and by you. What does it mean, Ludovico mio? For pity's sake tell me, what does it mean?"

And the pale features began to work, and the large deep eyes filled with tears, and the next moment she fell back into a chair sobbing hysterically.

“I was the last person with whom she was seen alive; and—there was, it seems, strong reason why it may be supposed that I should wish her dead—God help me! I learned this morning—the poor girl told me herself, to my extreme surprise—that my uncle, the Marchese Lamberto, had proposed marriage to her. You can understand, my darling, that such a marriage would be a very dreadful misfortune to me: therefore, people think that I put the unhappy girl to death.”

“Oh, my love, my love; come to me, come to me, and let me hold you!” said the poor girl, struggling to speak amid her convulsive sobbing, and holding out her hands towards him. “Oh, my Ludovico, this is very dreadful. But it is impossible—impossible! They will know that it is impossible that you could have done such a thing. Murder! You—murder a defenceless girl! Oh, it is nonsense. Nobody will believe anything so monstrous.”

“Thanks, my Paolina—thanks, my own darling. At least there is one heart that knows me. And,

my Paolina, it is an immense comfort to me—not that I doubted it for an instant—but it is an infinite comfort to me to know that you, at least in your heart of hearts, are certain that I did not—that it never could have entered into my mind to do this thing.”

“*I believe it!* I could just as soon imagine that I myself had done it. But, Ludovico, my beloved, it will not be believed; it is too monstrous. You are known here; it cannot be believed.”

“And yet, my Paolina, one who has known me all my life, who was my father’s friend—one who knows me well, and who looks at things as the magistrates will look at them—he believes it; believes it so much, and is so certain that others will believe it, that he strongly urged me to escape from the city, and from the country. That, Paolina, knowing my innocence, I would not do. To save myself from the stake I would not have gone away without telling you, my own one, that I had not done this deed. I could not go, and so leave you——”

“My own—my own! How I love you, my Ludovico, now in the time of this great trouble better than ever I did before. There was no need to *tell me*, my

love, that your hands are innocent of murder. But surely—surely you did well not to fly, leaving the hideous accusation behind you.”

“So I thought, my own love—my own high-minded right-thinking darling—so I thought; and here I stay to answer my accusers. But the fatality of the circumstances is such that—in truth, I see little hope of clearing myself, save by the possible discovery of the causes that led to this terrible death.”

“Was there anything to show how she—that is, I mean, whether she—died by violence?” asked Paolina.

“Nothing—nothing whatever. As we saw the body under the city gateway, when the men who found it brought it in, there was not the smallest trace of violence visible. She lay as if, save for the deadly pallor of her face, she might have been still sleeping. And I am most anxious for the medical examination of the body. It may be that they will be able to discover that death was produced by some natural cause.”

“Surely that is the most likely. Had any robbery been committed?” asked Paolina thoughtfully.

"None—none whatever; and she had valuables exposed on her person which were untouched. This is one of the worst circumstances against me; as it excludes the idea of the deed having been done by common malefactors for the sake of plunder."

"And no marks of violence? It must have been a natural death; such things *do* happen. I remember hearing of a case——"

"I must go, darling; I must leave you. I must hasten to the Palazzo del Governo to make my statement of what has occurred. It is hard to leave you, my Paolina—very hard to leave you, not knowing when or under what circumstances I am likely to see you again."

"Ludovico, see me again!" shrieked the girl, as a new and dreadful idea presented itself for the first time to her mind; "why—you will come to me when you have spoken to the magistrates; you will tell me what they say."

"I fear me, Paolina, that it will not be in my power to do that," returned Ludovico, with a melancholy smile. "Should they leave me at liberty, of course I shall fly to you on the instant they dismiss me. But, you must not expect that, my love. I

shall be detained doubtless, until—until the truth has been discovered respecting this horrible tragedy. One kiss, my own, own darling before we part.”

She sprang into his opened arms with a bound, almost before the words had quitted his lips, and clasped him to her heart with all the strength she could exert. Then drawing herself a little back, and placing her two little hands on the front of his shoulders, she said, speaking with breathless hurry,—

“See now, my love, my only love. You must remember all the time, that there is no hour of the day or night that I shall not be thinking of you, and loving you all the time, always, always. And remember, that if all the whole world says that you did this thing, I shall still know that it was as impossible as that I did it myself. Remember that always, my best beloved.”

“Thanks, my Paolina ; it will be very sweet to me to remember it. And dearest, one thing more. It will hardly be likely that in the present circumstances, under all this weight of misfortune, my poor uncle will be likely to have time or attention to give to you. But if you have need of anything—of advice, of assistance, of protection—speak to the Contessa

Violante, and—stay, you shall take a message to her from me. Tell her that I begged you to say, as from me to her, that in the teeth of all appearances I am innocent in thought, word, and deed in this matter. I think she will believe it; I must go, my love, my own ! ”

“ Pray God, it be not for long, *tesoro mio*. I shall pray to the Holy Virgin for you morning and night.”

“ *Addio*, Paolina mia. Yet one kiss, *anima mia*, *addio*.”

From the Strada di Santa Eufemia Ludovico hurried as quickly as he could to the Palazzo del Governo; but found that he was not in time to be the first bearer to the police magistrate of the tidings of what had happened. The report of the officials at the gate had already been given in, and the police had already taken possession of the body.

The magistrate received him with grave courtesy, saying that he was glad the Signor Marchese had presented himself in order to throw what light he could on this sad affair, as rumour had already reached his (the magistrate's) ears mixing the name of the Marchese Ludovico with the subject in a manner that would have made it his duty to call the

Marchese, had he not of himself judged it right to anticipate the action of justice in the matter.

Then Ludovico related clearly and shortly how the excursion to the Pineta had been imagined and planned between him and Bianca at the ball ; how they had put their plan into execution ; how he had left her sleeping in the forest, and had been unable to find her again ; how he had returned, after spending much time in fruitless seeking, and had shortly afterwards, being then in the company of Signor Giovacchino Fortini, seen the dead body of the unfortunate lady brought into the city by men who had discovered it in the forest.

The magistrate listened attentively to this history in silence, save that he once or twice interrupted Ludovico to ask at what o'clock it had been that the different incidents happened. Then he reduced the whole statement to writing, and read it over to the Marchesino.

“ Your lordship parted then from Signor Fortini, after witnessing in his company the arrival of the corpse at the gate, nearly an hour ago. You did not come to make your report to us here at once ? I must ask you how you have employed the interval ? ” said the magistrate shooting a sharp glance from

under his black eyebrows at Ludovico, who was sitting opposite to him, with a little table between them, on which there were writing-materials.

"In visiting a lady, to whom I was very anxious to tell these unfortunate circumstances myself, instead of allowing them to come to her ears in any other manner," answered Ludovico simply.

"The lady's name? I ask in confidence, you know; unless of course the fact should turn out to have any bearing on the discovery of the truth as to this most unhappy business."

"The lady is the Signorina Paolina Foscarelli, a Venetian artist sent here to make copies of some of our mosaics, and recommended to my uncle the Marchese Lamberto."

"With whom you had no acquaintance previous to her bringing that recommendation?"

"None whatever."

"But since that time you have become intimate with her?"

"It is true."

"Signor Marchese, this is a most lamentable and unhappy affair. It is my duty to point out to you, what doubtless your own good sense has already suggested to you—that the mere facts, as you have

related them to me, place you in a very unfortunate position. But most unhappily—it is exceedingly painful to me to have to say it—there is, if what has already reached my ears be true, worse, much worse behind. I am obliged to ask you what conversation, of a special nature, passed between you and Bianca Lalli during your excursion?”

“I will make no pretence at not understanding your question, Signor, nor any attempt to conceal the truth. I have already stated the facts; or that, which you have evidently heard, could not have reached your ears. The Signorina Bianca Lalli confided to me the fact, that my uncle the Marchese Lamberto had offered marriage to her.”

“Most lamentable, and to be regretted in every way,” said the magistrate, gravely shaking his head. “You perceive, Signor Marchese, the terrible, but inevitable suggestion, that arises from the fact of your having been made aware of a purpose so disastrous to your interests?”

“I call your attention, Signor, again to the fact, that nothing would have been known of any such communication having been made to me, had I not spontaneously mentioned the circumstance myself.”

“It is true, Signor Marchese, and it will not be

forgotten that this circumstance was spontaneously mentioned by you. But you must observe, that the fact of the proposal made by the Marchese Lamberto would have become known in more ways than one. And unhappily the fact that such a proposal had been made, would throw a very disagreeable light on the extraordinary circumstances of this death. To whom would the death of this unfortunate woman be profitable? That is the fatal question, Signor Marchese, which it is impossible to avoid asking."

"I am aware of the cruelty of the inference suggested by the circumstance, Signor Commissario," said Ludovico sadly.

"Have you any suggestion to offer yourself as to the possible means by which this woman may have met with her death?" asked the Commissary of Police.

"As far as I could see at the city gate, and according to the statement of the men who found the body, there was no indication of violence whatever to be found on it. My suggestion therefore, and my trust is, that the cause of her death was a natural one."

"That will be a question for the medical authorities to decide," said the Commissary.

"I was about to ask you whether they had proceeded to any examination yet?" said Ludovico.

"Not yet; we shall have the report immediately; and it shall be at once communicated to you."

"At the Palazzo Castelmare?" said Ludovico, though he had but very little hope that he should be allowed to remain at large.

The Commissary shook his head very gravely.

"I need hardly tell you, Signor Marchese, how painful it is to me to be compelled to announce to you that we cannot find it consistent with our duty to allow you under the circumstances to quit this building. The utmost that can be done to make your detention as little uncomfortable to you as possible, shall be done. And I can only say that I trust it may be but for a short time."

"Permit me to observe, Signor Commissario, that after seeing the dead body at the gate,—to say nothing of all the hours previously, if I had been guilty,—I had abundance of time to escape, and to place myself beyond the reach of the Papal authorities, before I could have been overtaken. I might have done so, but did not. Might not that be held to justify you in allowing me to retain my liberty until

the course of your inquiries may again require my presence ?”

“I fear not, Signor Marchese, I fear not. The fact that such a crime has been committed throws a terrible responsibility upon us. As to your not having availed yourself of opportunity to escape, I may remark that you may have been detained, not so much by your desire of meeting inquiry, as of having the interview, of which you told me just now. You say that you came directly from the Signorina Foscarelli’s dwelling hither. At that time it was too late for hope of escape. I fear, Signor Marchese, it will not be consistent with my duty to allow you to depart.”

So Ludovico was conducted to a very sufficiently comfortable chamber reserved for similar occasions, and found himself a prisoner, waiting trial on suspicion of murder.

CHAPTER III.

GUILTY OR NOT GUILTY ?

SIGNOR FORTINI hurried home, when he quitted the Marchese Ludovico in the little quiet street, in which they had talked together after the terrible sight they had together witnessed at the city gate, and shut himself up in his private room to think. He was much moved and distressed, more moved than the practised calm of the manner natural to him, and the slow movements of old age, allowed to be visible.

What a dreadful, what a miserable misfortune was this. A tragedy, if ever there was one, which would for ever strike down from their place an ancient and noble family, whose merit and worth had from generation to generation been the pride and the admiration of the entire city—a tragedy which would come home as such to the heart of every human being in Ravenna. Great heaven, what a fall !]

And this was the first outcome of the disastrous purpose of his old friend the Marchese. Truly he had felt that nought but evil—evils manifold and wide-spreading—could arise from so insane a line of conduct. But he had been far from anticipating so overwhelming a calamity as the first result of it.

Then, the deed itself ! It would cause an outcry from one end of Italy to the other. It would be a disgrace, and an opprobrium to the city for many a year. What ! Ravenna invites, entices this hapless girl, who had been the admiration of so many cities, to come within her walls ; and in return for the delight which she had given them—murders her. Other cities vie with each other in doing honour to the gifted artist. She ventures to Ravenna, and—is murdered.

There was a bitterness in Signor Fortini's consideration of the matter from this point of view, which was more poignant than any other man than an Italian would quite understand. For nowhere else do municipal pride, jealousy, and patriotism run so high.

A foul and cruel murder had been done : so much was certain. Signor Fortini had not the smallest hope that the death would be found to have resulted

from natural causes. And then came the consideration whether there could be any hope that, after all, the deed had been done by some other hand than that of the young Marchese di Castelmare.

After thinking deeply for several minutes, the lawyer shook his head. That such a deed might have been done in the forest on the person of one found sleeping there, whose appearance was such as to hold out the expectation of booty to a plunderer, was possible—not very likely, but possible. Possible enough to suppose that lawless and evil-disposed persons might have been wandering there—depredators on the forest, who exist in great numbers—smugglers making their way across the country by hidden paths, or what not? Possible enough that such a deed might have been done, and the perpetrators of it far away before the discovery of the body, away to the southward, and across the Apennine into Tuscany in the space of a few hours. *But* all such possibilities were conclusively negatived by the certain fact that no plunder had been attempted, that plunder could not have been the object of the murderer.

Alarmed before they could carry their object into execution by the approach of footsteps? Was this a plausible or a possible theory?

No ; for the poor Diva had valuable ornaments visible on her person, an enamelled gold watch at her girdle, a diamond pin or brooch at the fastening of her dress on her chest, to possess themselves of which would have needed less time than was required for the perpetration of the murder. It was wholly impossible to suppose, on any hypothesis, that the murder could have been committed for the sake of plunder, and that these ornaments could have been left untouched.

It had been observed, and was noted—not in the report drawn up by the officials at the gate, but in the more exact and detailed report furnished by the police on their taking of the body into their charge—that the brooch, which has been mentioned, was unfastened, so as to be left hanging in the dress by its pin. But this circumstance did not seem to be of much moment, as it might well have been that Bianca herself had unfastened it before falling asleep.

No ; it was but too clear, as the lawyer said to himself, that murder and not robbery had been the object of the perpetrator of the crime.

There was, it was true, nothing improbable in the story told by the Marchese Ludovico. That the girl should have been overpowered by sleep, after having passed the night at the ball, and then started on an

expedition so foreign to her usual habits, was abundantly likely. That he might have become tired of sitting still while she slept, and might have strayed away from her, not intending to quit her for more than a few minutes and a few yards, was also perfectly probable. That having so strayed he might have been unable to find his way back again to the spot where he had left her, or to be certain whether he had found the same spot again or not, would not seem at all unlikely to any one acquainted with the Pineta. All this story was likely and natural enough.

But—the motive—the inevitable inference from that terrible *cui bono* question. For whom was it profitable, that this poor girl should be put to death ? According to the fatal information, which, by his own account, he had received but a short time previously from the victim herself, information, the truth and accuracy of which were well known to the lawyer from the Marchese Lamberto himself, the whole future prospects in life of the Marchese Ludovico depended on the life or death of this unhappy woman.

If the Marchese Lamberto carried out his insane intention of marrying La Bianca Lalli his nephew would become simply destitute. After having been accustomed, from the cradle to the age of four-and-

twenty, to all that riches could procure—after having lived in the sure expectation of wealth up to an age when it was too late to think of making himself capable of earning a competence for himself in any conceivable manner, this marriage would take from him suddenly, and for ever, all such prospect ; and the death of the woman who had bewitched his uncle thus fatally would make all safe, for the Marchese Lamberto was not a marrying man—was, as all the town knew, the last man in the world to have dreamed of taking a wife now at this time of his life.

No ; it was the fatal fascination, the witchery, the lures of this one woman. Remove her, and all would be right.

Ah ! The mischief, the woe, the scandal, the disgrace, the irretrievable calamity, and the misery, that this accursed folly of the Marchese Lamberto had caused. Ah ! to think of all the sorrow and trouble this woman brought with her into the city when she was so triumphantly welcomed within the walls by these two unhappy men—the uncle and the nephew.

It was strongly and curiously characteristic of the Italian mind that Signor Fortini, in coming to the

conclusion that this deed must, beyond the possibility of doubt, have been committed by the Marchese Ludovico and none other, was mainly and specially moved by compassion for the perpetrator of the crime. There is something in this Italian mode of viewing human events and human conduct curiously analogous to that conception of mortal destinies on which the pathos of the old Greek tragedy mainly rests.

How cruel was the fate which had thus compelled the young man to perceive that the life of this girl and his own welfare were incompatible !

How dreadful the pitiless working of the great, blind, automatic, destiny-machine !

To raise a murderous hand against the life of a sleeping girl—how dreadful ! How great, therefore, must have been the suffering which impelled a man to do so !

He had evidently been driven to desperation by the prospect of the utter and tremendous ruin that threatened him ; and “desperation,” the absence of all hope, is recognized, both by the popular mind of Italy and by its theoretic theology, as a sufficient cause for any course of action. It is especially taught by Roman Catholic theology that it is, above

all things, wicked so to act towards a man as to drive him to desperation ; and the popular ethics invariably visit with deeper reprobation any cause of conduct which has tempted another man to make himself guilty of a violent crime than it does the criminal himself.

Thus, lawyer and law-abiding man as he was, with all the habits of a long life between him and the possibility of his raising his own hand against the life of any man, Signor Fortini, as he mused on the tragedy which had fallen out, felt more of compassion for the Marchese Ludovico, and more of anger against the folly of his uncle.

This thing, too, which the Marchese Lamberto had announced his intention of doing, sinned against all those virtues which, let the professions of the moral code say what they may, stand really highest in an Italian estimation. It was eminently unwise ; it was imprudent ; it was indecorous ; it was calculated to produce scandal ; it would bring disgrace upon a noble name ; it was ridiculous ; and, besides all this, it necessarily drove another to “ desperation.”

“ A fool ! An insane idiot ! Worst of all fools—an old fool ! To think that a man, who had stood so many years in the eyes of all men as he had stood,

should come to such a downfall. It would serve him no more than right, if it were possible, that all the consequences of what had been done should fall on his own head.

Still, during all the musings which seemed to force him to the conclusion that the crime which had been committed was the deed of the Marchese Ludovico, the old lawyer did not lose sight of the idea which had been suggested to his mind by that exclamation of Ludovico on the first sight of the murdered woman. He did not, in truth, as yet think that it was worth much ; but he kept it safe at the bottom of his mind, ready for being produced if subsequent circumstances should seem to give any value to it.

After musing an hour while these thoughts passed through his mind, the old lawyer thought he would go as far as the Palazzo del Governo to learn what steps had been taken, and whether—though he had very little doubt on that point—his unfortunate young friend had been detained in custody.

Signor Pietro Logarini, the head of the police, was an old acquaintance of Signor Fortini,—as, indeed, was pretty well everybody in any sort of position of authority in the city.

"A bad business this, Signor Pietro," said Fortini, shaking his head.

"The worst business, Signor Giovacchino, that has happened in Ravenna as long as I can remember. It is very terrible."

"Is the poor young fellow——?" Signor Fortini completed his question by a movement of his eyes, of one shoulder, and one thumb, quite as intelligible to the person he addressed as any words would have been.

"Yes, of course. There was no help for it, you know."

"Of course not. I suppose he came here as soon as he parted from me. It so happened that we were together at the gate when the body was brought there," said Signor Fortini.

"So I understand. You will be called on for your evidence as to his manner on being confronted with it."

"Of course; fortunately I have nothing to say on that point that can do any damage. He was much moved, naturally; we both were; but nothing more than any man in his place would have been."

"But the worst, the only fatal point in that confession of his, is that the girl told him of the

Marchese Lamberto's intention of marrying her. Why in heaven's name did he let that slip out?"

"My notion is that it just did slip out, as you say. An old hand, a man accustomed to be at odds with the laws and the police, would have known better. Did he make the same statement here?" asked Fortini, rather surprised.

"On my asking him, as I felt compelled to do, what special conversation had passed between him and the girl that morning, he told me the fact," replied the Commissary.

"But what led you to ask him such a question?" said Fortini.

"Ah!—something that had reached my ears. We are forced, you know, Signor Giovacchino, to have very long ears in our business. His conversation with you to-day was held in the street,—a bad place for such talk, Signor Giovacchino."

"And not chosen by me for such a purpose, as you may imagine. Little could I guess what sort of confidence I was about to hear."

"Not that it makes any difference. All that would have had to come out, you know, Signor Giovacchino."

"Oh, quite so, quite so; no, no difference in the

world. Did he come to you immediately on leaving me ? ”

“ No ; it would have been better upon the whole if he had done so. He went first, it seems, to the residence of a lady, one Signorina Paolina Foscarelli, being very desirous, he said, of not leaving her to hear of the business from other lips than his own. It is a pity, because his abstaining from flight might have been something in his favour, if he had not made it appear, that his remaining in the city might have been caused by his desire to see again this Paolina. Do you know anything about her ? I see by our books that she came here last autumn from Venice. What is she like ? ”

“ It so happens that I never saw her. But I am told that she is pretty—very pretty—remarkably so.”

“ Ah—h—h ! that’s what kept the poor young fellow from running till it was too late to run. And yet,” continued the Commissary, pausing on his words, and tapping his forehead with his finger as if a new idea had just occurred to him—“ and yet the young Don Juan goes out *tête-à-tête* into the forest with this other girl.”

“ *Che volete ?* ” returned the lawyer with a shrug. “ Boys will be boys, and women—are women.”

“Yes; but the women sometimes don’t quite like——” and the Commissary allowed the remainder of his sentence to remain unspoken, being apparently too much occupied with his thoughts to speak it.

“I suppose the medical report can hardly have been made yet?” asked the lawyer, on whom the suppressed meaning of the Police Commissary’s broken sentence was not lost.

“No; there has not been time. It was too late in the afternoon. Professor Tomasarchi will make a *post-mortem* examination the first thing to-morrow morning; and I daresay we shall have his report in the course of the day, if, as is most likely, there is nothing to call for more than a superficial examination.”

“I shall be very anxious to hear the result of his investigation—very. I will look in, if you will allow me, to-morrow morning. And now I think I will go to that unfortunate man, the Marchese Lamberto. I should not be at all surprised if I were to find that he had heard nothing about all this. Only think what it is I shall have to tell him—the woman about whom he has been so mad as to have determined on sacrificing to her everything, fame, position, friends, respect,—everything—is dead! It is his monstrous

proposal that has caused her death ; and the same folly has made the representative of his house a murderer and a felon. Think, Signor Pietro, what that man's feelings must be when these tidings are told him."

"Depend upon it, the whole city knows all about it by this time," said the Commissary.

"But I think it exceedingly likely that he has not been out of his library all day," returned the lawyer.

"But the servants will have heard the news. Ill news travels fast," said the Commissary, with a shrug.

"Yes ; but the servants will hardly have ventured to repeat such tidings to him. Two to one it will fall to my lot to tell him. A pleasant office, isn't it, Signor Pietro ?"

"Not one I should like to undertake. Good-evening, Signor Giovacchino. If I don't see you to-morrow morning I will send you a couple of lines with the result of the medical examination."

"Thanks, Signor Pietro ; but I will look in about the beginning of your office hours to-morrow morning. I feel as if I should be able to think of nothing else but this terrible business for some time to come. *Felice sera.*"

And so the old lawyer went off to call upon his client, the Marchese Lamberto, truly dreading the interview, and yet not without a certain degree of satisfaction, and a kind of I-told-you-so feeling in the prospect of announcing to the unhappy Marchese those terrible first-fruits of the disastrous purpose, in condemnation of which the lawyer had spoken so strongly a few hours ago.

CHAPTER IV.

THE MARCHESE HEARS THE ILL NEWS.

SIGNOR FORTINI judged rightly, when he said that he thought it probable that the Marchese Lamberto had not quitted his library, from the time when he had left him there, after the conversation, in which the Marchese had avowed his purpose with regard to La Blanca.

The shrewd lawyer had well understood, that the final decision with regard to such a purpose, and the definite announcement of it, which the Marchese had made to him, his lawyer, were not likely to dispose such a man to meet the eyes of his fellow-citizens. Had Fortini known that the Marchese had been made aware of the purposed excursion of his nephew with the singer—as the reader knows that he had been by the officious meddling of the Conte Leandro,—it might have seemed strange that he should have

chosen just that day and hour for the declaration of his intention. Was it that he hastened to acquire such an authority over Bianca, as might enable him to put an end to any such escapades for the future? Was it that he was infatuated to that degree, that he feared that if he did not make haste to secure the prize, it might be taken from him by his nephew?

However this might have been, the overt step he had taken had certainly not had the effect of tranquillizing his mind. The hours of that day, since the lawyer left him, had been passed in the most miserable manner by him.

The servants had all learned, that there was something very decidedly wrong with their master. The man who usually attended on him personally, surprised at his master spending the day in a manner so unusual with him, had made various excuses to enter the library two or three times in the course of the day. Each time he had found the Marchese, instead of being busily employed, as was usual with him, when in his library, either sitting in his easy-chair with his hands before him, and his head hanging on his breast, doing absolutely nothing; or else pacing up and down the room.

As the afternoon went on, and the Marchese still

did not go out, his valet, really uneasy about him, found the means of watching him without entering the room. Again and again he saw him rise from his chair and, after two or three turns across the room, return to it. Often he went to the window, and looked out, as if expecting something. Three or four times he observed him start violently at the sound of a door banging in some other part of the palace.

Once in the course of the afternoon the servant had had a genuine excuse for entering the room. The Conte Leandro had called, and asked if the Marchese was at home. He had not seen the Marchese Ludovico in the course of the day, and was curious to find out what had been the result of the eavesdropping that he had retailed to the Marchese Lamberto. That it had not availed to induce the Marchese to interfere in any way to put a stop to the excursion, the Conte Leandro had the means of knowing, as will presently appear. But his curiosity was doomed to remain unsatisfied. The Marchese had replied with a savage ill-humour, that the old servant had never seen in his master before, that he did not want to see the Conte, leaving the domestic to modify the harshness of the reply as he might.

When, however, some hours later, Signor Fortini came to the door, and despite what the servants told him of the state their master was in, and of his refusal to see the Conte Leandro, insisted on being announced, the Marchese admitted him.

The first thought that flashed through the lawyer's brain, when he came into the presence of his old friend and client, was a profound sense of self-congratulation at his own freedom from all connection with womankind.

His own experience of married life, essayed in early years and happily brought to a conclusion after a probation of a very short time, had, as has been hinted, not been a happy one. He had very deeply felt, some five-and-forty years ago, that nothing in the Signora Fortini's life had become her like the leaving of it. And during all those years of widowhood, the remembrance of that first burning of his fingers had sufficed to make the old gentleman a consistent misogynist.

"Ah, here is another specimen of women's work," he thought to himself, as he observed the utter wretchedness of the Marchese's appearance, and the traces in him of a day spent in misery. "And he, too, who had escaped for fifty years! If I had

avoided the springes for fifty years, I don't think I should have been caught at last. Maybe, it is all the worse for coming to a man so late. Now here is this man, who had everything the world could give to make his happiness, wrecked, ruined, destroyed, blasted by the sight of a painted piece of woman's flesh, and the lure of a pair of devil-instructed eyes. And he knows that it is ruin. He knows which is the evil, and which the good, and yet is so besotted, that he has not the power to take the one and leave the other. Is not the sight of the unhappy wretch, as he sits cowering there, afraid, evidently afraid to meet my eye, a warning and a caution?"

And, in truth, the appearance of the Marchese might have been held to justify these reflections of the lawyer, who was right in supposing that no tidings of what had happened had reached the Marchese since he had parted from him after their interview that morning. Attributing, therefore, the state of utter moral prostration, mixed with a kind of restless nervous agitation, in which he found him, to the consciousness of the terrible results he was about to bring upon himself by the folly he had decided on committing, the lawyer could not prevent the thought occurring to him that were it not for

the dreadful circumstances that seemed to bring home the suspicion of murder to the Marchese Ludovico, the tidings he brought of the death of the unfortunate woman would be, if not a relief at the moment, yet the most fortunate exit for the Marchese from the position he had made for himself.

“Good-evening, Signor Giovacchino. You have come, of course, to ask whether the representations you made to me this morning have availed to induce me to waver in the purpose I announced to you,” said the Marchese, scarcely looking up so as to meet the eye of the lawyer.

“Signor Marchese,” returned Fortini, “it is my turn this time to communicate to you intelligence which will strike you, I fear, to the full as painfully as I was struck by what you told me this morning.”

The Marchese started ; and the lawyer observed that the start seemed to continue and propagate itself, as it were, into a tremor, that ran through all his person, as he said, with chattering teeth : “What do you mean ? Has anything happened ?—anything—out of the common way, eh ?—eh ?—what—what is it ?”

“That has happened, Signor Marchese, which makes all further consideration of the step you

confided to me your intention of taking this morning unnecessary. The lady, whom you purposed to make your wife, is no more."

"No more—how no more?—what—what is it you mean?" said the Marchese, evidently terribly shocked, as was manifested by the tremor and shivering which seized him yet more violently than before; yet still without looking up so as to meet the lawyer's eye.

"She is dead, Signor Marchese," said the lawyer, looking at him curiously.

"Dead—La Bianca dead! I don't believe it. It is some scheme for frustrating the purpose you disapproved of—some plan managed between you and my nephew. You have sent her away, and want to persuade me that she is dead."

"Your mind is unhinged by the shock of my intelligence, Signor Marchese—naturally enough—or such an absurd notion would not have occurred to you. I have seen the dead body of Bianca Lalli. It is now in the custody of the police," said the lawyer, with slow gravity.

"The police!" cried the Marchese, shooting a momentary glance up into the lawyer's face.

"Necessarily so; for, Signor Marchese, the un-

happy—the miserable truth is that a foul murder has been committed. The girl was murdered in the Pineta this morning.”

“Murdered! Gracious heaven! Murdered—but why murdered? Why may she not have died by a natural death?—that is—I mean—of course I mean, if there were no evident marks of violence on the body.”

The lawyer paused a minute, as if some cause of perplexity had been suggested to him by the words of the Marchese, before he replied,—

“There were, in truth, no marks of evident violence on the body, or, at least, none such as an unskilled eye could observe on a very superficial examination. But all that will be ascertained at the medical examination, which will take place to-morrow morning. But I think it can hardly be doubted that the death was not a natural one,” said the lawyer, shaking his head gravely.

“And the Marchese Ludovico?” asked the Marchese, rather strangely, as it struck the lawyer, seeing that nothing had as yet been said to connect the young Marchese with the catastrophe, and he was not aware of the fact that the Marchese knew of his nephew’s excursion to the Pineta.

That, alas ! is the worst part of the bad story—we, at least, here in Ravenna are perhaps excusable in thinking it the worst. The fact is, Signor Marchese, that this death took place under circumstances which seem to leave no doubt that the deed was done by the hand of the Marchese Ludovico.”

“The hand of the Marchese Ludovico ! Gracious heaven ! But that is nonsense, Signor Fortini. No doubt ? How can there be no doubt, merely because he was with her in the forest ? ”

There was something in the Marchese’s manner which made it seem to the lawyer as if he must have already heard of the tragedy that had happened, and of the suspicion that had been thrown on his nephew.

“Were you aware, then, Signor Marchese,” he asked, “that the Marchese Ludovico had gone to the Pineta with this unhappy woman ? ”

The Marchese dropped his head upon his chest and paused a minute, passing his hand slowly across his brow and before his eyes, before he replied,—

“Yes, I knew that,” he said, at length ; “the Conte Leandro told me of it.”

“Your people told me, just now, that you had

refused to see the Conte Leandro, when he called," remarked the lawyer, again looking puzzled.

"Yes, I refused to see him because my mind was full of the conversation we had this morning. You know I promised you, Signor Fortini, that I would think over the matter again; and I was engaged in doing so. I have been thinking of it all day; I was thinking of it still when you came in."

"Thinking still of your purpose of making the woman, La Bianca, your wife. Then you could not have heard of her miserable end when I came in,—as I supposed, indeed, you could not have heard," remarked the lawyer.

"Heard of it? Why of course not. That is clear—that proves that I could not have heard of it, you know," said the Marchese, with a strange sort of eagerness.

"When was it, then, that you heard from the Conte Leandro, that the Marchese Ludovico was in the Pineta with La Bianca?" asked the lawyer.

"At the ball," replied the Marchese, after a minute's thought, "at the ball. He came to me and told me that they had planned an excursion to the forest, as soon as they left the ball-room. The Conte Leandro told me of it, because, he said, he thought it

an imprudent thing, and I should disapprove it. But why should I, you know? I said nothing to either of them about it. Why not let them have such an innocent enjoyment? Young people must be young, you know, Signor Fortini. For my part, I preferred making the best of my way to my bed, after being up all night."

There was a strange kind of nervous eagerness and hurry in the Marchese's manner of saying this, which struck the lawyer as affording yet further evidence of the degree to which his mind had been utterly unhinged by the struggle which had been going on in it, doubtless for a longer time than he, the lawyer, was aware of, between the influence over him which the singer had acquired, and his sense of the terrible nature of the step she was inducing him to take. It seemed necessary to recall his attention to that view of the matter which was now of the most urgent interest, the suspicions which rested on the Marchese Ludovico.

"As you say, Signor Marchese," he resumed, "that Signor Ludovico should have been with La Bianca in the forest, affords no proof sufficient to convict him of being the author of this crime; although the fact of his being the last person in

whose company she was ever seen alive, does suffice, in a certain degree, to throw on him the onus of showing that he is innocent of it. But the worst is—the damning feature of the matter is, that he had a very strong and intelligible reason for wishing this Bianca out of the way. Remember that your marriage with her would have the effect of reducing him to beggary. Put that fact side by side with the facts that he takes her to a solitary place in the Pineta, and that she is shortly afterwards found there murdered ; and I am afraid—I am dreadfully afraid that the judges will not resist the conclusion that, in truth, seems forced upon them. It is a bad business, Signor Marchese ; a very bad and ugly business.”

“But I had not mentioned to the Marchese Ludovico my intention with regard to the girl. How could he have been led to do such an act by such a motive, when he knew nothing of it ?” said the Marchese, after several minutes of consideration.

“Unfortunately he did know it, and has himself stated that he knew it. It seems that the girl herself took the opportunity of their drive together to tell him of the fact. Would to heaven that she had never done so,” said Fortini, with a deep sigh.

“But anybody must see that it is a thousand

times more probable that she should have been killed by robbers—vagabonds tramping through the country. The Pineta is always full of them. I am sure I would no more lie—I would no more wander there alone!—Of course the unfortunate girl must have been murdered by brigands.”

“If any robbery had been committed, there might be reason to hope so, or at least ground for such a theory. But, unfortunately, she had exposed on her person valuables exceedingly tempting to a thief; but they remained untouched.”

At that moment there came a loud and hurried rapping at the door. The Marchese started violently in his chair, and turned deadly pale; another proof, if more were needed, of the degree in which his nervous system had been shaken by the intelligence he had received, coming, as it did, on the back of all that had previously contributed to unhinge his mind. In the next instant, a servant put his head into the room, saying that the Conte Leandro had returned, and was urgent to be admitted to see the Marchese, declaring that he had a very important communication to make to him.

“I cannot see him. I will not see him. I will see nobody. Signor Fortini, would you have the

whose company she was ever seen alive, does suffice, in a certain degree, to throw on him the onus of showing that he is innocent of it. But the worst is—the damning feature of the matter is, that he had a very strong and intelligible reason for wishing this Bianca out of the way. Remember that your marriage with her would have the effect of reducing him to beggary. Put that fact side by side with the facts that he takes her to a solitary place in the Pineta, and that she is shortly afterwards found there murdered; and I am afraid—I am dreadfully afraid that the judges will not resist the conclusion that, in truth, seems forced upon them. It is a bad business, Signor Marchese; a very bad and ugly business.”

“But I had not mentioned to the Marchese Ludovico my intention with regard to the girl. How could he have been led to do such an act by such a motive, when he knew nothing of it?” said the Marchese, after several minutes of consideration.

“Unfortunately he did know it, and has himself stated that he knew it. It seems that the girl herself took the opportunity of their drive together to tell him of the fact. Would to heaven that she had never done so,” said Fortini, with a deep sigh.

“But anybody must see that it is a thousand

times more probable that she should have been killed by robbers—vagabonds tramping through the country. The Pineta is always full of them. I am sure I would no more lie—I would no more wander there alone!—Of course the unfortunate girl must have been murdered by brigands.”

“If any robbery had been committed, there might be reason to hope so, or at least ground for such a theory. But, unfortunately, she had exposed on her person valuables exceedingly tempting to a thief; but they remained untouched.”

At that moment there came a loud and hurried rapping at the door. The Marchese started violently in his chair, and turned deadly pale; another proof, if more were needed, of the degree in which his nervous system had been shaken by the intelligence he had received, coming, as it did, on the back of all that had previously contributed to unhinge his mind. In the next instant, a servant put his head into the room, saying that the Conte Leandro had returned, and was urgent to be admitted to see the Marchese, declaring that he had a very important communication to make to him.

“I cannot see him. I will not see him. I will see nobody. Signor Fortini, would you have the



whose company she was ever seen alive, does suffice, in a certain degree, to throw on him the onus of showing that he is innocent of it. But the worst is—the damning feature of the matter is, that he had a very strong and intelligible reason for wishing this Bianca out of the way. Remember that your marriage with her would have the effect of reducing him to beggary. Put that fact side by side with the facts that he takes her to a solitary place in the Pineta, and that she is shortly afterwards found there murdered ; and I am afraid—I am dreadfully afraid that the judges will not resist the conclusion that, in truth, seems forced upon them. It is a bad business, Signor Marchese ; a very bad and ugly business.”

“But I had not mentioned to the Marchese Ludovico my intention with regard to the girl. How could he have been led to do such an act by such a motive, when he knew nothing of it ?” said the Marchese, after several minutes of consideration.

“Unfortunately he did know it, and has himself stated that he knew it. It seems that the girl herself took the opportunity of their drive together to tell him of the fact. Would to heaven that she had never done so,” said Fortini, with a deep sigh.

“But anybody must see that it is a thousand

times more probable that she should have been killed by robbers—vagabonds tramping through the country. The Pineta is always full of them. I am sure I would no more lie—I would no more wander there alone!—Of course the unfortunate girl must have been murdered by brigands.”

“If any robbery had been committed, there might be reason to hope so, or at least ground for such a theory. But, unfortunately, she had exposed on her person valuables exceedingly tempting to a thief; but they remained untouched.”

At that moment there came a loud and hurried rapping at the door. The Marchese started violently in his chair, and turned deadly pale; another proof, if more were needed, of the degree in which his nervous system had been shaken by the intelligence he had received, coming, as it did, on the back of all that had previously contributed to unhinge his mind. In the next instant, a servant put his head into the room, saying that the Conte Leandro had returned, and was urgent to be admitted to see the Marchese, declaring that he had a very important communication to make to him.

“I cannot see him. I will not see him. I will see nobody. Signor Fortini, would you have the



whose company she was ever seen alive, does suffice, in a certain degree, to throw on him the onus of showing that he is innocent of it. But the worst is—the damning feature of the matter is, that he had a very strong and intelligible reason for wishing this Bianca out of the way. Remember that your marriage with her would have the effect of reducing him to beggary. Put that fact side by side with the facts that he takes her to a solitary place in the Pineta, and that she is shortly afterwards found there murdered ; and I am afraid—I am dreadfully afraid that the judges will not resist the conclusion that, in truth, seems forced upon them. It is a bad business, Signor Marchese ; a very bad and ugly business.”

“But I had not mentioned to the Marchese Ludovico my intention with regard to the girl. How could he have been led to do such an act by such a motive, when he knew nothing of it ?” said the Marchese, after several minutes of consideration.

“Unfortunately he did know it, and has himself stated that he knew it. It seems that the girl herself took the opportunity of their drive together to tell him of the fact. Would to heaven that she had never done so,” said Fortini, with a deep sigh.

“But anybody must see that it is a thousand

times more probable that she should have been killed by robbers—vagabonds tramping through the country. The Pineta is always full of them. I am sure I would no more lie—I would no more wander there alone!—Of course the unfortunate girl must have been murdered by brigands.”

“If any robbery had been committed, there might be reason to hope so, or at least ground for such a theory. But, unfortunately, she had exposed on her person valuables exceedingly tempting to a thief; but they remained untouched.”

At that moment there came a loud and hurried rapping at the door. The Marchese started violently in his chair, and turned deadly pale; another proof, if more were needed, of the degree in which his nervous system had been shaken by the intelligence he had received, coming, as it did, on the back of all that had previously contributed to unhinge his mind. In the next instant, a servant put his head into the room, saying that the Conte Leandro had returned, and was urgent to be admitted to see the Marchese, declaring that he had a very important communication to make to him.

“I cannot see him. I will not see him. I will see nobody. Signor Fortini, would you have the

whose company she was ever seen alive, does suffice, in a certain degree, to throw on him the onus of showing that he is innocent of it. But the worst is—the damning feature of the matter is, that he had a very strong and intelligible reason for wishing this Bianca out of the way. Remember that your marriage with her would have the effect of reducing him to beggary. Put that fact side by side with the facts that he takes her to a solitary place in the Pineta, and that she is shortly afterwards found there murdered ; and I am afraid—I am dreadfully afraid that the judges will not resist the conclusion that, in truth, seems forced upon them. It is a bad business, Signor Marchese ; a very bad and ugly business.”

“But I had not mentioned to the Marchese Ludovico my intention with regard to the girl. How could he have been led to do such an act by such a motive, when he knew nothing of it ?” said the Marchese, after several minutes of consideration.

“Unfortunately he did know it, and has himself stated that he knew it. It seems that the girl herself took the opportunity of their drive together to tell him of the fact. Would to heaven that she had never done so,” said Fortini, with a deep sigh.

“But anybody must see that it is a thousand

times more probable that she should have been killed by robbers—vagabonds tramping through the country. The Pineta is always full of them. I am sure I would no more lie—I would no more wander there alone!—Of course the unfortunate girl must have been murdered by brigands.”

“If any robbery had been committed, there might be reason to hope so, or at least ground for such a theory. But, unfortunately, she had exposed on her person valuables exceedingly tempting to a thief; but they remained untouched.”

At that moment there came a loud and hurried rapping at the door. The Marchese started violently in his chair, and turned deadly pale; another proof, if more were needed, of the degree in which his nervous system had been shaken by the intelligence he had received, coming, as it did, on the back of all that had previously contributed to unhinge his mind. In the next instant, a servant put his head into the room, saying that the Conte Leandro had returned, and was urgent to be admitted to see the Marchese, declaring that he had a very important communication to make to him.

“I cannot see him. I will not see him. I will see nobody. Signor Fortini, would you have the

And with that the old lawyer turned away to go back to the library ; while the poet, though not altogether without a somewhat annoying notion that he was laughed at, was nevertheless delighted with the excellent idea that had been suggested to him.

“ I made him understand that you could not see him. All he wanted was to tell you just what I have already communicated to you,” said the lawyer, as he came back into the room. “ He said too, by-the-by, that all the town was talking of the offer of marriage made by the Marchese Lamberto to Signora Bianca Lalli—— ”

“ Of course, of course,” groaned the Marchese, tossing himself restlessly from one side to the other of his chair. “ And to think that at the very time,— at the hour when I was communicating to you the decision I had arrived at with regard to—to that unfortunate—to poor Bianca, she was even then, as it would seem, lying dead in the forest. It is very, very terrible.”

“ And I told the Signor Conte that he could not do better than contradict such a report wherever he heard it,” added the lawyer, who began almost to fancy, from a something that seemed strange to him in the Marchese’s manner, that the catastrophe which

had come to relieve him in such a terrible manner from the scrape he had got himself into with the singer, was not altogether unwelcome to him.

"It is of no use, Fortini," returned the Marchese, with a groan; "it is of no use. That old man, her reputed father, knows it; their servant knows it; Ludovico knows it: and, of course, his knowledge of it will have to be made public."

"Nevertheless, the denial of it by such a tongue as that of the Conte Leandro Lombardoni can do no harm in the meantime," said the lawyer, quietly. "It *may* be," he added, "it *may* be that something may turn up to prevent any public accusation of the Marchese. It *may* be that he is not guilty. It *may* be that the deed may yet be brought home to some other hand."

"Do you think that, Fortini? do you think that likely?" said the Marchese, with a quickly withdrawn anxious look into the lawyer's face.

"No, frankly, I do not think it likely. I fear that it is very certain that his hand is the guilty one. Nevertheless, it may be—it is difficult to say—it *may* be. At all events, it is always time enough to abandon hope. I must leave you now, Signor Marchese; I will see you again to-morrow morning."

“Many, many thanks, my good Signor Giovacchino. Do not forget to come. Remember how dreadfully anxious I must be to hear what passes: above all, the result of the medical examination—specially the result of the medical examination.”

“I will not fail to come. *I miei saluti*, Signor Marchese.”

CHAPTER V.

DOUBTS AND POSSIBILITIES.

IN passing through the hall of the Palazzo the lawyer, who was well acquainted with every servant in the house, took an opportunity of speaking a few words to the Marchese's old valet, Nanni.

"The Marchese' seems to have been a little overtired when he came back from the ball this morning, Nanni; and then this is a sad affair about the Marchese Ludovico."

"*Ahi, misericordia!* To think that I should live to hear of a Castelmare arrested in Ravenna. The world is coming to an end, I think, Signor Giovacchino."

"Vexing enough; but not so bad as all that, I hope. No doubt Signor Ludovico will be able to clear himself before long."

"Clear himself!" re-echoed the old servant,

very indignantly; "that's just what they say when some poor devil of the *popolaccio* is at odds with the police. The Marchese di Castelmare clear himself! Well, I've lived to see a many things, but I never thought to see the day that such people should dare to meddle with a Castelmare."

"The Marchese Ludovico himself thought fit to go to them to give explanations."

"Ah! He'd have done better to take no notice of 'em, to my thinking," said the old man, shaking his head. "But is it true, Signor Giovacchino, what people say, that——?"

"There is mostly very little truth in what people say, Nanni," interrupted the lawyer. "But I'll tell you what: a good servant should hear all and repeat nothing. It's natural that such an old friend as you should want to know all about it, and to you I shan't mind telling the whole story as soon as I know the rights of it myself. But it vexes me to see the Marchese so put out about it; and then I don't think he has been quite well latterly."

"Nothing like well, these days past, Signor Giovacchino. The Marchese has not been like hisself nowadays. I think he is far from well."

"Does he get his rest at night? That is a great

thing at his time of life. He seems to me like a man who has not had his natural sleep. I suppose he went to bed when he came home from the ball?"

"Yes, directly. He seemed in a hurry like to get to bed. When he was about half undressed he said it was time I was in bed myself, and sent me away, and I heard him lock the door."

"Does he generally lock the door at night?" asked the lawyer.

"No; and I knew by that that he meant to have a good sleep, and not be disturbed this morning. So I never went near him till I heard his bell, between ten and eleven o'clock; and when I went he was just getting out of bed, so that he had a matter of six hours' sleep."

"It don't seem to have done him much good any way," rejoined the lawyer, thinking to himself that the hours during which Nanni supposed his master to have been sleeping, had more probably been spent in restless agitation, the result of bringing his mind to the determination which he had definitely announced to the lawyer, when he had summoned him about an hour after he had risen from his sleepless bed. "I shall come and see how he is to-morrow morning," the lawyer added; "and I

hope I may bring some good news about Signor Ludovico."

Behind the Palazzo Castelmare there was an extensive range of stabling and coach-houses, with a large stable-yard opening on to a back street, which was the nearest way to the house of the Signor Professore Tomosarchi, on whom Signor Fortini thought he would call, just to ask whether he had yet seen the body, or at what hour in the morning he thought of making his post-mortem examination. Crossing the stable-yard for this purpose, the lawyer was accosted by Niccolò the groom, who was engaged in doing his office on a handsome bay mare at the stable-door.

Niccolò was the oldest servant in the establishment, having filled the same place he now held under the Marchese's father. He was an older man by several years than the Marchese Lamberto; and he it had been, who, when the present Marchese was a child of ten years old, had put him on his first pony, and been his riding-master. Old Niccolò, like every other old Italian servant of the old school, held, as the first and most important article of his creed, the unquestioning belief that the Castelmare family was the most noble, the most ancient, and in every

respect the grandest in the world, and the Marchese Lamberto the greatest and most powerful man in it. He was a good sort of man in his way, was old Niccolò; went to confession regularly; and did his duty in that state of life to which it had pleased Providence to call him according to his lights; was honest in his dealings; knew in a rough sort of way that veracity was good, and unvaracity bad, to such an extent as to understand that truth-telling should be the rule and lying the exception; and was faithful to the death to his employer.

Old Niccolò was also a very perfect specimen of the product of a peculiar way of thinking, which was a speciality of the rapidly disappearing class to which he belonged. He did not imagine for a moment, that the laws and rules of morality and duty, by which he had been taught, that he ought to regulate his own conduct, were at all applicable to his master. Even if he had ever troubled his mind by plunging so far into the depths of speculation, as to consider, that in truth the various matters forbidden in the commandments were in the sight of God, or, what was more within his ken, in the sight of the Church, equally forbidden to all men, still it would have been clear to him that there was no reason why such great

people as the Marchese di Castelmare, with Cardinals for his friends, and wealth enough to pay for any quantity of indulgences and masses he might require, should not indulge in peccadilloes and vices which poorer folks cannot afford. Probably, however, he had never reached any such profundity of speculation. He saw that the Church and its ministers treated his superiors very differently from their treatment of him, and expected from him quite different conduct from that which they expected from them. And the result was an habitual and practical belief, that the great folks of the world, of whom he considered that his own master was unquestionably the greatest, were far above the laws in every sort which were binding on himself and the like of him.

Nor of all the many acts which honest Niccolò would have scrupled to do on his own account, would he have hesitated a moment to become guilty at the command, or on the behoof of, his master. As for his own soul's weal, it probably was sufficiently safeguarded by the paramount nature of the duty which required him to do the will of his employer; or, in any case, what was his soul that any care for it should come into competition with the will of the Marchese Lamberto di Castelmare? Niccolò would

have been profoundly ashamed at admitting to any one of his own class that the family he served were not so great and so masterful as to render it a matter of course that their will must override all other considerations whatsoever.

To old Niccolò it was indeed as a symptom of the end of all things—as a rising of the powers of darkness against the established order of God's world—that a Marchese di Castelmare should be arrested. It was incomprehensible to him. There was but one power great enough, as he understood matters, to accomplish so dread a catastrophe; and that was the power of the Marchese Lamberto himself. And he inclined accordingly to the belief, that if indeed the Marchese Ludovico were in prison, the truth was that for some inscrutable reason the Marchese Lamberto chose that so it should be.

“Is it really true, Signor Giovacchino,” whispered the old man, coming close up to the lawyer, as the latter was crossing the stable-yard; “is it really true that the Marchese Ludovico has been put in prison?”

“Well, that much is true, I am afraid, Niccolò; but I hope it may not be for long,” said Fortini, pausing in his walk, as though he were not unwilling to talk to the old man.

"Couldn't ye say a word to the Marchese, to take him out?" said the old groom coaxingly; "if so be as the woman is dead, what is the use of any more ado about it?"

"Well, I hope there may not be much more ado about it. She was probably killed, poor woman, by some strolling vagabonds. But I wish it had not happened to vex the Marchese just now. He is not well, the Marchese. Has he ridden much lately?"

"Hasn't backed a horse since the first week in Carnival," said the old groom emphatically.

"I hope he will take to his riding again, now Carnival is over. I think it helps to keep him in health," remarked the lawyer.

"I'm sure I wish he would, for my part," returned the groom; "and I wished it this morning, I can tell you. I was a-taking his own mare out this morning—it's a week since she has been out of the stable—and she was that fresh it was pretty well more than I could do to hold her. I brought her in all of a lather, and splashed with mud to her saddle-girths. People must ha' thought I had been riding a race,—that is, if any of them had seen me when I came into the yard; but there wasn't a soul of 'em

stirring. Catch any of the lot up at that time the first morning in Lent."

"He is getting old, too. It would have been a mighty hard horse to ride that my friend Niccolò would not have been able to hold a year or two ago," thought the lawyer to himself, as he walked out of the stable-yard into the little back street that runs behind the palazzo, and pursued his way thoughtfully towards the residence of the celebrated anatomist.

And again, as he walked, the lawyer turned his mind, with all the analytical power of which he was master, to the question whether or no there were any possibility of hope that the Marchese Ludovico were innocent of the crime imputed to him,—whether there were any other theory possible by virtue of which any other person might be suspected of the deed.

His anxiety to speak with Professor Tomosarchi indicated, indeed, that he had not wholly abandoned, despite what he had said on that point both to the Marchese Ludovico and his uncle, the hope that the death might be pronounced to have resulted from natural causes. Possibly, had the lawyer possessed more medical knowledge, this chance might have

seemed to him a somewhat better one ; but, to his thinking, it was altogether incredible that a healthy girl of Bianca's age should lie down to sleep, and, without any such change of position as would disorder her attire—without any evidence of a death-struggle—should simply never wake again. Again the lawyer's meditations told him that small hope was to be found in this direction.

Were there any persons in the city who might be supposed to feel enmity or ill-will towards the singer ? Many a one of the young nobles had, doubtless, been kept at arms' length by Bianca in a manner that might easily be supposed to breed hatred in a vain and ill-conditioned heart. But murder—and such a murder ! It was difficult to suppose that such a cause should be sufficient to produce such an effect ; yet vanity is a very strong and a very evil-counselling passion.

Vanity ? Ha ! could it be ? Surely there never was so absurdly, so grossly, vain a creature, as that Conte Leandro ? And the poor murdered Diva had quizzed, and snubbed, and mortified him again and again. The lawyer had heard that much ; and Leandro was aware of the fact that Bianca was to be in the Pineta at that time. So much was clear from

what the Marchese had said. But she was to be there with Ludovico—how could the poet expect to find her alone? Could it be that he had followed them merely for the sake of making mischief and rendering himself disagreeable, and had chanced to come upon her asleep and alone? Could *this* be the clue?

But it would surely be easy to ascertain to a certainty whether the Conte Leandro had left the city that morning or not. If only it could be shown that he had done so? The amount of probability that he had really been the perpetrator of the crime, or the possibility of convicting him of it, would signify comparatively little. It would be sufficient if only a competing theory, based on a possibility, could be set up; if only such an alternative possibility could be presented to the minds of the judges as should justify them in feeling that the matter was too doubtful to warrant a conviction.

Then, suddenly, as he thought on all the causes of hatred that Bianca might be supposed to have inspired, his mind reverted to those words which Signor Pietro Logarini, the head of the police, had let drop when speaking of the Signorina Paolina Foscarelli:—
“Women, who are fond of a man, don’t like to see

him with another woman, and a beautiful one, under the circumstances in which the Marchese might have been seen with Bianca."

That was the sense of the remark to which the Commissary had partially given utterance; and now the lawyer thought of it. He was tempted to believe that Logarini had been struck by the same idea that had before flashed into his mind almost with the force of a revelation.

Might it not have been the hand of the Venetian girl, maddened by jealousy, which had taken the life of her rival, while she slept?

Such a story would by no means be now told for the first time. Very far from it. Men had not now to learn *furens quid fœmina possit*.

Paolina was known to have left the city at that suspiciously strange hour of the morning. She was known to have been, at all events, at no very great distance from the spot where the crime was committed.

And was it not possible that, on the theory of Ludovico's innocence, the true explanation of the exclamation, which had escaped from him at the city gate, was to be found in supposing that he, too, had been struck by a similar thought? Might not that

outcry on Paolina, uttered when the speaker knew well that it was Bianca and not Paolina that lay dead before him, have been forced from him by the sudden thought that she had done the deed then revealed to him ?

For the first time the shrewd lawyer began to feel a real doubt as to the author of the crime. It might be that the Marchesino was innocent after all,—that his account of the events of that morning, as far as he was concerned, was simply true. As his mind dwelt on the matter the case against Paolina seemed to acquire additional force. It could be proved that this girl had been deeply and seriously attached to the Marchese Ludovico. It could be proved that she had seen her lover *tête-à-tête* with so dangerous a rival as the singer in circumstances that she had every right to consider very suspicious. It could be proved that she had been not far from the spot where the murder was committed much about the time when the deed must have been done.

It is an essentially and curiously Italian characteristic that the lawyer's rapidly growing conviction that Paolina had indeed been the criminal was strengthened and made easier of acceptance to his mind by the fact that the suspected criminal was not

a townswoman but a Venetian. It would have seemed less possible to him that a young Ravenna girl should have done such a deed. But one of those terrible Venetian women of whom so many blood-stained tales of passion and crime were on record !

Signor Fortini really began to think that his mind had strayed into the true path towards the solution of the mystery at last. And he was very much inclined to think that the germ of such a notion had already been deposited in the mind of the Police Commissioner.

In any case here was wherewithal to establish such a case of suspicion as should make it difficult for the tribunal to condemn the Marchesino on such evidence as could be brought against him, supposing no new circumstances to be brought to light.

Not for that reason, however, was the lawyer disposed to relinquish the idea which had occurred to him as to the possibility of incriminating the Conte Leandro. The more circumstances of doubt it was possible to accumulate around the facts, so much the better.

Signor Fortini thought that he saw his way clearly

enough to the means to showing that it was very presumable that the Conte Leandro had conceived a violent and bitter hatred of the murdered woman. It was enough to base a case for suspicion on. The lawyer had no idea that the poet had been the murderer. He did not dream of the possibility that he should be convicted of the crime. He had, doubtless, been quietly in bed in Ravenna at the hour it had been committed. But he might find it difficult to prove that he had *not* quitted the city on that Wednesday morning. And the suggestion of the possibility of his guilt would, at all events, be an element of doubt and difficulty the more.

With these thoughts in his mind Signor Fortini suddenly changed his immediate purpose of going to the Professore Tomosarchi; and determined to walk as far as the Porta Nuova and make inquiry himself of the people at the gate as to the testimony they might be able to give respecting Paolina's exit from the city at a very early hour on that morning. At the same time, it might be possible to lead them into imagining that they had seen some other passenger; who *might* have been the Conte Leandro. It was very desirable that this inquiry should be made without delay. For it was no part of the duty

of the gate officers to make any written note of such a circumstance ; and it would entirely depend on their recollection to say whether such or such a person had passed the gate. At the same time, that such a person as this Paolina Foscarelli should pass out of the city at such an hour in the morning, was sufficiently out of the ordinary course of things to make it very unlikely that it should not be remembered by the officials.

As the lawyer pursued his way towards the gate in deep thought he was comforted as to the complexion of his client's case by the consideration of his own state of mind. He found it impossible to come to any definitive conclusion as to the balance of the probabilities. At one moment his mind swung back to his original conviction that the Marchese Ludovico had yielded to the temptation of making himself safe from the destitution that awaited him if his uncle's purpose were carried out. The persuasion that it was so seemed to come like a flash of light upon him. Then, again, thinking of all the stories of what women have done under the influence of a maddening jealousy, he reverted to the superior probability of the other hypothesis.

Arrived at the gate the lawyer's success was

greater than he had ventured to anticipate. *Both* the persons respecting whom he made inquiry had been seen to pass out of the city at a very early hour that morning.

To his great surprise he heard that the Conte Leandro had passed the gate before it was daylight; and the officer had been struck by the strangeness of the circumstance. He was much muffled up in a large cloak, with a broad-brimmed hat drawn down over his eyes and face. But his person was perfectly well known to the official; and he had recognized him without difficulty.

He also perfectly well remembered seeing the girl—a remarkably pretty girl—pass through about an hour or a little more afterwards. And, imagining that the one circumstance explained the other—that it was an affair of some assignation outside the city in the interest of some amourette that was attended by difficulties within the walls—he had thought no more about it.

But Signor Fortini knew enough to feel very sure, that the exceedingly singular facts, as they seemed to him, of both these persons having gone out of the city in the direction of the Pineta at such an unusual hour, was not to be accounted for by any such

explanation. But neither did it seem in any degree likely or credible, that these two facts, the passing out of the Conte Leandro, and the passing out of Paolina, should have had any connection with each other in reference to the murder in the Pineta.

It was strange, very strange !

It was so strange and unaccountable that Signor Fortini felt that, unless some fresh circumstances should be brought to light beyond those which had as yet become known either to him, or to the police, it was safe to predict that the tribunal would not have the means of coming to any conclusion concerning the author of the murder.

The lawyer turned away from the gate, and strolled through the streets without any intention as to the direction in which he walked, so deeply was he pondering upon the possibilities that were brought within his mental vision by the extraordinary facts he had ascertained.

He would almost have preferred, he thought, as he pursued his way profoundly musing, that it should have been shown that one only, instead of *both* the persons towards whom the possibilities he had imagined, pointed, had gone at that strange hour towards the locality of the crime.

Nevertheless, as he said to himself, the more doubt, the more elements of difficulty, the better. In truth the chance seemed to be a very good one, that it might *never* be known who gave that wretched girl her death.

CHAPTER VI.

AT THE CIRCOLO AGAIN.

AT the Circolo that evening there was no lack of subject for conversation, as may be easily imagined. The rooms were very full, and every tongue was busy with the same topic.

“For my part I don’t believe that La Bianca is dead at all. What proof have we of the fact? Somebody has been told that somebody else heard some other pumpkin-head say so. Report, *signori miei*, is an habitual liar, and I for one never believe a word she says without evidence of the truth of it,” said the Conte Luigi Spadoni, a man who was known to make a practice of reading French novels, and was therefore held to be an *esprit fort* and a philosopher, in accordance with which character he always professed indiscriminate disbelief in everything.

“Oh come, Spadoni, that won’t do this time.

Bah, you are the only living soul in the town that don't believe it then. Evidence, *per Dio!* Go and ask the men at the Porta Nuova, who received the body, when the *contadini* brought it in," cried a dozen voices at once.

"But Spadoni has the weakness of being so excessively credulous," said a bald young man with gold spectacles, looking up from a game of chess he was playing in a corner.

"Who, I? I credulous? That is a good one! Why I said, man alive, that I *disbelieved* it," cried Spadoni, eagerly.

"I know it, and very credulous indeed it seems to me, to believe that all the people, who say they have seen the *prima donna's* dead body, should be mistaken in such a fact, or conspiring without motive to declare it falsely. I call that very credulous," said the chess-player, quietly.

"Did you ever see such an addle-pate. He can't understand the difference between believing and disbelieving," rejoined Spadoni triumphantly, and carrying the great bulk of the bystanders with him.

"But as to the poor girl being dead, there is unhappily no shadow of doubt at all," said the Baron Manutoli; "I saw old Signor Fortini the lawyer just

now, who told me that he was at the Porta Nuova when the body was brought in."

"And is it true that the Marchese Ludovico was with him, and fainted dead away at the sight of the body?" said a very young man.

"It is true that Ludovico was there with Fortini at the gate, but I heard nothing about his fainting; and should not think it very likely."

"Well, I don't know about that, I should have thought it likely enough by all accounts," said the Conte Leandro Lombardoni, whose face was looking more pasty and his eyes more fishy than usual.

"Much *you* know about it. Why, in the name of all the saints, should it be likely? What should Ludovico faint for?" rejoined Manutoli, fiercely.

"What for? Well, one has heard of such things. And as for what I know about it, Signor Barone, maybe I have the means of knowing more about it than anybody here," said the poet.

"Here is Lombardoni confesses he knows all about it," cried one.

"That ought to be told to the Commissary of Police," said another.

"I say, my notion is that Leandro did it himself," exclaimed a third.

"Ah, to be sure. What is more likely? We all know how the poor Diva snubbed him. Remember the fate of his verses. If that is not enough to drive a man and a poet to do murder I don't know what is. To be sure, 'twas Leandro did it," rejoined the first.

"I can believe that, if I never believe anything else," said Spadoni.

"Let's send to the Commissary and tell him that the Conte Leandro confesses that it was he that murdered La Bianca," cried one of the previous speakers.

"What on earth are you dreaming of," cried the persecuted poet, turning ghastly livid with affright; "I know nothing about the matter, nothing! How in the world should I know anything about it?"

"Oh, I thought you knew more about it than anybody else just now," sneered one of his persecutors.

"He looks to me very much as if he *did* know something about it in sober earnest," said the bald-headed chess-player; who had been looking hard at the evidences of terror on the poet's face.

"But where is the Marchese Ludovico?" asked the same young man, who had heard that the Marchese had fainted at the sight of the body.

A general silence fell on the chattering group at this question : till Manutoli answered with a very grave face : " Ah, you must ask the Commissary of Police that question, Signor Marco."

" You don't mean that he is arrested ? " returned the youngster thus addressed.

Manutoli nodded his head two or three times gravely, as he said, " That is the worst of the bad business ; and a very bad business it is in every way."

" You don't mean that you think Ludovico can have done it, Manutoli ? " said one of the others.

" No, I don't say I think so. I don't know what to think. I should have said, that I was just as likely to do such a thing myself, as Ludovico di Castelmare. But if there is any truth in what is said, that the Marchese Lamberto was going to marry the girl, it looks very ugly. God knows what a man might be driven to do in such a case."

" I suppose if the old Marchese were to marry and have children, Ludovico would have about the same fortune as the old blind man that sits at the door of the Cathedral ? " asked the previous speaker.

" Just about as much. He would be absolutely a beggar," said the Conte Leandro, who appeared to find considerable pleasure in the announcement.

"I think, that if that was the case, and Ludovico had put the unlucky girl out of the way, it would be the Marchese Lamberto who ought to bear the blame of it. An old fellow has no right to behave in that sort of way," said one of the group.

"Of course he has not. To bring a fellow up to the age of Ludovico in the expectation that he is to have the family property; and then to take it into his head to marry when he is past fifty. If Ludovico had put a knife into him instead of into the girl, I should have said that it served him right," said another.

"And what was the good of murdering the girl? If the old fellow wants to be married, he will marry some other girl if not this one. Girls are plenty enough," said a third.

"Ay, but not such girls as La Bianca; what a lovely creature she was! I don't wonder at the Marchese being caught by her, for my part, seeing her every day as he did," remarked a fourth.

"Bah, girls are plenty enough, as Gino said, and pretty girls too. And if the Marchese was minded to marry, it wasn't the murder of this poor girl that would stop him," said one of the others.

"And that is a strong reason, as it strikes me, for

thinking that Ludovico had nothing to do with it. He must have known, as well as we, that it was likely enough his uncle would find somebody else," remarked Manutoli.

"Well, we shall see. But I would wager a good round sum that Ludovico did it," said the Conte Leandro; who had by that time recovered his tranquillity.

"Oh, now here's Leandro, who begins to think again that he does know something about it," said the Barone Manutoli.

"I said nothing of the sort, Signor Barone. How should I know? But everybody may have his opinion, and that is mine. We shall see by-and-by," returned Leandro, waspishly.

"I'll tell you what, *signori miei*," said Manutoli; "let it turn out as it may, it is the saddest and worst affair that has been seen in Ravenna for many a day. I won't admit the thought, for my part, that the Marchese Ludovico has really committed this murder. I should prefer to suppose, that some vagabonds had done it for the sake of robbery, and had been disturbed before they could carry out their purpose, or anything. But it is a very sad affair. I would have done I don't know what, rather than

that it should have happened. Think what will be said. That's what an artist gets by venturing to Ravenna. You will see the noise that will be made all over Italy."

"But why does it follow that anybody is to blame at all? Why may she not have put herself to death?" said one of the previous speakers.

"A suicide! that is a new idea. But it does not seem a very promising one. Why should she kill herself? She was in the full tide of success, and had just received an offer of marriage, if what we hear is true, from the richest man in Ravenna. Is it likely that she should choose just that moment to make away with herself?" replied another.

"In any case the doctors will know what to tell us about that. They can always tell whether anybody has killed themselves or been murdered by somebody else."

"By the way, Signor Barone, have you heard whether the medical report has been made yet? But I suppose the police would not let us know what the doctor's opinion was, if it *had* been made. Who knows who has been employed to examine the body?"

"I know!" answered the Baron Manutoli, "the Professore Tomosarchi. And whatever can be found out by examining the body, he will find out, depend

upon it. I was asking about it just now. The examination will take place to-morrow morning."

"But who ever heard of such a thing as going off to the Pineta at that time in the morning, and after being up all night at a ball too?" said Lombardoni, spitefully. "Why, it looks as if a man must have had some scheme, some out-of-the-way motive of some kind to do such a thing."

"Not at all," returned Manutoli, angrily; "I don't see that at all. A charmingly imagined frolic, I should say, a capital wind-up for a last night of carnival. I should have liked it myself."

"And then," said one of the others, "one can't refuse such a girl as La Bianca. And it's two to one that she asked Ludovico to take her, for a lark."

"But I happen to know," said Leandro, quickly, "that it was he who proposed it to her. He persuaded her to go."

"And how in the world do you know that, pray?" asked Manutoli, turning sharply upon him.

"I—I heard it said. I was told so. I am sure I don't know who it was said so. Nobody has been talking about anything else. Some fellow or other said that Ludovico had proposed the trip to her."

"The fact is, in short, that you know just nothing

at all about it. You happen to know, forsooth ! It seems to me, Signor Conte, that you are strangely ready to fancy you know anything that might seem to go against Ludovico," rejoined Manutoli.

"And what would be the result if it should turn out that he was guilty—if he were condemned?" asked one of the younger men, looking afraid of his own words, as he spoke them.

"God knows,—the galleys, I suppose. But one must not imagine such a thing. It is too frightful," said Manutoli.

"Horrible ! Shocking ! Impossible !" cried a chorus of voices.

"Good God ! Result ! The disgrace and destruction of the noblest family in the province. The ending of a fine old name in infamy. Gracious heaven, it is too horrible to think of," exclaimed Manutoli, with much emotion.

"It would kill the old Marchese as dead as a door-nail, for one thing," said another of the group of young men.

"And serve him right too. If it is really true that he has contemplated being guilty of such a monstrous piece of injustice and folly," said the same man, who had before expressed a similar opinion.

Just then a servant of the Circolo came into the room and put a note into the hands of the Baron Manutoli.

"It is from Ludovico, asking me to go to him. So there's an end to our game of billiards, Signor Conte," said Manutoli to one of the group ; "I must go at once."

"But you'll come back here after you've seen him, won't you ? You'll come back and tell us all about it, Manutoli ?" said two or three of the group which had been discussing the topic.

"I don't know, I shall see. I will, if I can—if it's not too late. It may be that I shall be detained with him. I suppose that he has had no means of communicating with any of his people since the police folks clapped their hands on him.

"Do look in here for a moment, Manutoli. We shall all be anxious to hear about him, poor fellow," said another of the young men, who had pressed around Signor Manutoli as soon as it was known from whom his note had come.

"If I can I will. It is likely enough he may want me to go somewhere else for him. We shall see. *A rivederci, Signori.*"

CHAPTER VII.

A PRISON VISIT.

THE note which had been given to the Baron Manutoli begged him to come with as little delay as possible to the Palazzo del Governo.

Adolfo Manutoli was a somewhat older man than the majority of those who had formed the group which had been discussing the all-absorbing topic of the day at the Circolo ; and he was Ludovico di Castelmare's most intimate friend among the younger members of the society in which he lived. It was a friendship strongly approved by the Marchese Lamberto, as might have been perceived by his selection of Manutoli to accompany him on the occasion of meeting La Lalli on her first arrival in Ravenna, as the reader may possibly remember. And the special ground of this approval was Manutoli's strong advocacy of the projected marriage between Ludovico and the Contessa

Violante, and his consequent disapproval and discouragement of his friend's friendship and admiration for Paolina. He was not a man who would have counselled or desired his friend to behave badly or unworthily to Paolina or to any woman ; for he was a man of honour and a gentleman. But, short of any conduct which could be so characterized, he would have been very glad to see the Marchese quit of an entanglement which alone stood in the way, as he conceived, of his forming an alliance so desirable in every point of view as the marriage with the great-niece of the Cardinal Legate.

" Can I be permitted to see the Marchese Ludovico, Signor Commissario ? He has requested me to come to him," said the Baron, on arriving at the police-office.

" Certainly, Signor Barone. I myself sent his note to you. Though, on his own statement of the very unfortunate circumstances connected with this unhappy affair, I was compelled to detain him, still there is at present no definite accusation against him which should justify me in preventing him from having free communication with his friends. You shall be taken to his room immediately. You will see, Signor Barone, that we have endeavoured to

make him as comfortable as the circumstances would allow."

"Manutoli," said Ludovico, after the first expressions of astonishment and condolence had been spoken between the young men, "of course I knew I should see you here before long; and my note was to call you at once, instead of waiting to see you in the morning, because I want you to do something for me before you sleep this night—something that I don't want to wait for till to-morrow morning."

"To be sure, my dear fellow, anything; I am ready for anything, if it takes all night."

"Thanks. Well, now, look here: I am innocent of this deed——"

"*S' intende*; of course you are."

"*S' intende*, of course; that's just the worst of it. It is so much a matter of course that I should say I had not done it if I had, that my saying so is of no use at all. Nevertheless, to you I must say that I neither did it nor have I the slightest conception or suspicion who did. And you may guess that the fact itself is a horror and a grief to me that I shall never get over, putting this dreadful suspicion of my own guilt out of the question. A horror and

a grief, and a remorse, too ; for if I had not moved away from her the tragedy could not have happened."

"I really do not see that you need blame yourself for——"

"I ought not to have left her side. Yet, God knows, it never entered my head to dream of the possibility of any harm ; all seemed so still, so peaceful, so utterly quiet ; yet, at that moment, the hand that did the deed could not have been far off."

"Let the circumstances have been what they might," resumed Manutoli, after a moment's pause, "nobody would have dreamed of connecting you with the deed had it not been for the strong motive which seems so clear and intelligible to every fool who sets his brains to work on the matter. I suppose it is true that you had been informed of your uncle's intention to offer the poor girl marriage?"

"True that I had been told of it, for the first time, by herself during our drive, poor girl."

"Ah—h—h ! To think of such a man being guilty of such insane folly—and of all the misery that is likely to grow out of it. How on earth did she ever contrive to get such a fatal influence over him?"

“She schemed for it from her first arrival here—aimed avowedly to herself at nothing less than inducing the Marchese di Castelmare to marry her—and succeeded. For all that, I’ll tell you what, Adolfo—there was a great deal more good in that poor girl than you would have thought.”

“Bah! Good in her—— Well, she’s gone. She has had her reward, poor soul; and I pity her with all my heart. But as for the good in her——”

“There *was* good in her, and not a little. I tell you that if you or any one else could have heard all that passed between us, I should hardly be suspected of having murdered her, poor girl.”

“That is likely enough; but——”

“Do you know, Manutoli, I have a very strong idea that if this had not happened, the marriage with the Marchese would never have come off?”

“You think that, between us all, we should have induced him to listen to reason?”

“I don’t know about that; I was not thinking of that; I think that Bianca would have been induced to listen to reason; I think that the scheme would have come to nothing through her renunciation of it.”

“When, according to your own account, she had been scheming all the time she has been here to bring it about ?” said Manutoli, with arched eyebrows.

“Yes, even so. She had never known—how should she?—that such a marriage would turn me out on the world a beggar ; she had never known what sort and what degree of misery and ruin it would bring about to all parties.”

“And you told her this ?”

“Yes, in some degree I told her. As to the effect of such a marriage on myself, I told her simply the entire truth.”

“And you are disposed to think that the Diva—— No, poor girl ! I didn’t mean to speak sneeringly of her. She has paid for her fault a heavier penalty than it deserved, any way. You are disposed to think, then, that she would have given up the prize of all her scheming—this marriage, which was to have given her everything in the world that she could desire, and more than she could have ever dreamed of attaining ; she would have voluntarily relinquished all this, you think, for your sake ?”

“I’ll tell you what it is, Manutoli. A man can never appreciate,—can never fathom, the depth of a woman’s generosity till he has tried it.”

"But, *caro mio*,—after all I don't want to be hard upon her, poor soul, God knows!—but to expect generosity on such a point from such a woman——"

"You may say what you will, Manutoli. I know what she was, poor girl, as well as you do—better, a great deal; for, I tell you, that there was a real generosity in her nature. Look here," continued Ludovico, after a pause of a minute or two, "I would not say it to anybody else than you, or to you either, except under circumstances that make one wish to state the whole truth exactly as it was. It seems so coxcomb-like,—so like what our friend Leandro would say; but I may say it to you. The fact is, I have a kind of idea that that poor Bianca was inclined to like me. She cried when I told her——"

"Aha, *j'y suis!* Now I begin to be able to fathom the depth of a woman's generosity. Given the fact of becoming Marchesa di Castelmare, the lady was not disinclined to become so by catching the nephew instead of the uncle; and small blame to her."

"You do not do the poor woman justice, Manutoli."

"Any way, I do you justice; and I know you well enough, Ludovico mio, to understand that the

generosity of such a girl as this poor Lalli was, taking that special form, must have been very touching to you."

"You forget, Manutoli, how little accessible I was to the flattery of any such preference, with my whole heart full of a very different person."

"And I was just thinking, to tell you the truth, how the little scene in the *bagarino* would have struck that other person if she could have seen La Bianca giving you to understand, amid her tears, upon what terms she would consent not to come between you and your natural inheritance."

"That other person *did* see us in the *bagarino* ; and that brings me to the motive which led me to beg you to come to me this evening. Somehow or other, it has become known to these people here that Paolina went out of the Porta Nuova at a very early hour this morning. The fact is, that she simply went to see whether the scaffolding, which I had had prepared for her copying work there, was all right, and ready for her to begin her task there ; and all that can be proved, of course. But the same idea that occurred to you just now, that Paolina might not have liked to see me driving with La Bianca, has suggested itself to some other wiseacre,—I beg your

pardon, Manutoli,—and it seems that an absurd notion—a notion the monstrous absurdity of which is a matter of amazement to me—has been engendered that my poor Paolina may have been the perpetrator of the crime. The idea! If they only knew her! But the Commissary here has been cross-questioning me in a way that shows that is the notion he has in his head. Whether they know that Paolina really did see us in the *bagaròno* together—she did so from the window in the Church of St. Apollinare—or whether they only know that she left the city by that gate early in the morning, I can't tell; but it is sure to be found out that she did really see us,—the more so, that she will say so to the first person who asks her, the poor innocent darling. And what I want you to do is to see her, and prepare her, poor child, for the possibility of being arrested, and make her understand that no harm can possibly come to her. Try to save her from being frightened. She knows well enough, just as well as I know myself, that *I* have not done this thing. Try to make her understand that a little time only is necessary for the finding out of the real culprit; that it is sure to be discovered, and that, as far as we are concerned, it is all sure to come right."

“ You wish me to go to her at once ? ”

“ Yes, if you would be so kind. What I am anxious for is that you should see her before any order for her arrest shall have been issued. But that is not all. I want you to see Fortini also. I want you to ascertain from him how far it is possible or probable that any suspicion may rest on Paolina in consequence of the facts which are known ; how far it is likely that any attempt may be made to set up a case against her. And I want you to tell him that it will be wholly and utterly vain to make any such attempt, that the result would only be entirely to cripple my own defence. For you must understand once for all, and make him understand once for all, that rather than allow her to be convicted of a deed of which she is as innocent as you are, I would confess myself to be the guilty party. It shall not be, Manutoli,—mark what I say, it shall not be,—that she shall be dragged to ruin and destruction by my misfortune, or imprudence, call it what you will. Of this, of course, you will say no word to her. But I beg you to leave no shade of a doubt as to my settled purpose in this matter on the mind of Signor Fortini. It is he, of course, who will have the duty of preparing and

conducting my defence; and it is essential that he should understand this rightly. Will you do this for me?"

"Of course I will—this or anything else that I can do for you. But I can't undertake to say what Signor Giovacchino Fortini may think, or say, or do in the matter, you know. I will take your message, and then, of course, you will see him yourself in the course of to-morrow morning. Of course, old fellow, I need not tell you that I am sure you did not murder the girl; but it is altogether one of the most mysterious things I ever heard of. Nevertheless my notion is that we shall find out the culprit yet. And you may depend on it that two-thirds of the whole population of the town will be moving heaven and earth to get some clue to the mystery for your sake."

"It seems to me, too, that such a deed cannot but be found out. I should be more uneasy than I am, did I not console myself with thinking so. Now go to Paolina, there is a dear good fellow."

"One word more—shall I see the Marchese?"

"I think, perhaps, it is best not to do so. Of course Fortini has been with him, and told him everything. I almost thought that I should have seen him here this evening; but, under the circumstances,

I am better pleased that he should stay away. Better leave him to Fortini."

"Good-night, then."

"Good-night. You will let me see you to-morrow ?"

"I won't fail. Good-night."

CHAPTER VIII.

SIGNOR GIOVACCHINO FORTINI AT HOME.

THE Baron Manutoli was Ludovico di Castelmare's very good friend. But there are two sorts of friends ; —friends who show their friendship by wishing, and endeavouring to obtain for us, what we wish for ourselves ; and friends, whose friendship consists in wishing for us things analogous to what they wish for themselves ;—who endeavour to procure for us, not what we wish, but what they consider to be good for us.

Now the Baron Manutoli belonged to the latter of these two categories. He was some years older than Ludovico ; had been a married man, and was now a widower with one little boy, the future Baron Manutoli ; and considered himself as having been blessed with a supreme and exceptional degree of good fortune, with regard to all that appertained to that difficult and often disastrous chapter of human

destinies which concerns the relations of mankind with the other sex. Happiness and advantages, ordinarily incompatible and exclusive of each other, had in his case by a kind destiny been made compatible. For the representative of an old noble family to remain single, was bad in many points of view. But on the other hand—when one's ancestral acres are not so extensive as they once were, and in nowise more productive—when one likes a quiet life enlivened by a moderate degree of bachelor's liberty,—when one sees the interiors of divers of one's contemporaries and friends,—when one thinks of mothers-in-law, and sisters-in-law, and a whole ramified family-in-law!—the Baron Manutoli, though he had grieved over the loss of his young wife when the loss was recent, was now, after some ten years of widower's life, inclined to think that of the man, who had a legitimately born son to inherit his name and estate, who had done his duty towards society by taking a wife, and who was yet enabled to enjoy all the ease and freedom from care of a bachelor's life, it might be said, “*Omne tulit punctum.*”

Far as he was from undervaluing the importance of the social duties of a man and a nobleman in respect to these matters, he had always been an

earnest advocate of the marriage which Ludovico was expected to make with the Contessa Violante; and had regarded poor Paolina, from the first, as an intruder and disastrous mischief-maker; and Ludovico's love for her as the unlucky caprice of a boy, respecting which, the evident duty of all friends was to do all they could to discourage it, put it down, and get rid of it.

So that in the matter of the commission which Ludovico had entrusted to him, the Baron was likely enough to have somewhat different views from those of his friend.

What a happy turning of misfortune into a blessing it would be, if this shocking affair should be the means of getting rid of this unlucky Paolina altogether! Not, of course, that the Baron was capable of wishing that such getting rid of should be accomplished by the unjust condemnation of the poor girl for such a crime. God forbid! But, if there should be found to be a sufficient degree of suspicion—of unexplainable mystery—to cause the exoneration of Ludovico, and at the same time, an intimation to the Venetian stranger that she would do well to remove herself from the happy territory of the Holy Father, what a Godsend it would be!

Then, again, as to the real fact of Paolina's innocence, Manutoli was seriously disposed to think that there might be grounds for considerable doubt. Ludovico's assertions to that effect were of course unworthy of the slightest attention ; the mere ravings of a man in love. Of course, also, the menace he held out, that if any attempt were made to throw the onus of the crime on Paolina, he would meet it by avowing himself guilty, was as entirely to be disregarded. The paramount business in hand was to clear his friend of this untoward complication in the matter of the crime which had so mysteriously been committed. The next consideration was to set him equally free from his entanglement with Paolina. And with these thoughts in his mind, the Baron decided that, upon the whole, it would be better that he should have an interview with lawyer Fortini, before making his visit to the lady.

He knew that it was too late to look for the lawyer at his " studio ; " and therefore went directly to his residence, where he found the old gentleman just concluding his solitary supper. Being the evening of Ash Wednesday, the meal had consisted of a couple of eggs, and a morsel of tunny fish preserved in oil, very far from a bad relish for a flask of

good wine. And the lawyer was, when Manutoli came in, aiding his meditations by discussing the remaining half of a small cobwebbed bottle of the very choicest growth of the Piedmontese hills.

"I owe you a thousand apologies, Signor Fortini, for coming to trouble you with business, and very disagreeable business too, here and at such an hour," began the Baron; "but the interest we all feel——"

"Not a word of apology is needed, Signor Barone. About this shocking affair in the Pineta, of course, of course? *Pur troppo*, we are all interested, as you say. Will you honour my poor house, Signor Barone, by tasting what there is in the cellar? I ought to be ashamed to offer this wine, my ordinary drink at supper, to the Barone Manutoli"—(the old fellow knew right well that there was not such another glass of wine in all the city, and that it was rarely enough that his noble guest drank such)—"but it is drinkable." And so saying, he called to his old housekeeper to bring another bottle and a fresh glass before he would allow Manutoli to say a word on the business that brought him there.

"And now, Signor Barone," said the old lawyer, as soon as the wine and the praise it merited, had been both duly savoured, "about this bad business?

Do you bring me any information ? Information is all we want. I hope and trust information is all we want," he repeated, looking hard at the Baron.

"Of course, that is all we want ; information which should put us on some clue to the real perpetrator of this crime."

"*That* is what we want ; that is the one thing needful ; and it is absolutely needful," said the lawyer, again looking meaningly in his companion's face.

"Of course that is what we want. But even supposing no light upon the matter can be got at all, it is not to be supposed that—that any judge would consider there was sufficient ground for assuming our friend to be guilty ? "

"Ah, that's just the point ; just the point of the difficulty. We must not expect, Signor Barone, that the judges will look at the question quite with the same eyes that we do. They will have none of the strong persuasion that we—ahem !—that the Marchese Ludovico's friends have—that he is wholly incapable of committing such a crime. On the other hand, they are men used to suspicion, and to the habit of considering a certain amount of suspicion as equivalent to moral certainty. And I confess—I must confess, my dear sir, that I am very far from

easy as to the result, if we should be unable to find at least some counterbalancing possibilities, you understand ? ”

“ But it seems to me, Signor, that such are already found ; and it was just upon this point that I was anxious to speak with you to-night. I have just seen Ludovico. He sent for me to the Circolo. And what he mainly wanted was to bid me go to the Signorina Paolina Foscarelli, in order to prepare her for the probability of her own arrest, and to comfort her with the assurance that no evil could come to her. Also I was directed by him to tell you, that any attempt to fix the guilt of this deed on the girl, would be met by an avowal—a false avowal, of course—that he is himself the guilty person.”

“ Ta, ta, ta, ta ! Mere stuff, chatter, the talk of a boy in love with a pretty girl,” said the lawyer.

“ Just so, just so. Of course we pay no attention to all that. I promised to go to the girl as he told me ; and I shall do so presently. But I thought it best to see you first. The fact is, Signor Fortini, that I do not feel any one bit of the certainty that he professes to feel, that this Venetian girl may not have been the real assassin.”

The lawyer looked shrewdly into Manutoli's face, and nodded his head slowly three or four times.

"What would there be so unlikely in it," pursued Manutoli ; "girls, and Venetian girls too, have done as much and more before now ? We know that she is in love with him. She sees him going on such an expedition as that with such a girl as La Bianca. She has already, no doubt, had cause to be jealous of her. Ludovico used to see the Lalli frequently. What is more likely ? "

"Stay, Signor Barone, one minute. This is an important point ; you say that this Paolina *saw* her lover with La Bianca. How do you know that ? and how did it come about ? "

"Ludovico just told me so ; and the girl, it seems, herself told him. Her story is that she went out to St. Apollinare at an early hour this morning to look after a scaffolding or some preparation of some kind that had been made for her to copy some of the mosaics in the church ; and that from a window of the church, being on the scaffolding, she saw Ludovico and La Bianca driving by in a *bagarino*. Now all this probably is true enough. The question is, What did she do then, when she saw what was so well calculated to throw her into a frenzy of jealousy ?

My theory is, that she followed them into the forest, dogged their steps, and finding her opportunity at the unlucky moment when Ludovico left Bianca sleeping, did the murder there and then."

The old lawyer started up from his seat, and thrusting his hands into the pockets of his trousers took a hasty turn across the room; and then resuming his seat, tossed off a glass of wine before making any reply.

"And a very good theory too, Signor Barone. I make you my compliment on it," he said at last. "I was not aware of all the facts, the very important facts, you mention. I had ascertained that this Venetian girl left the city by the Porta Nuova at a strangely early hour this morning; and that was enough already to fix my eye upon her. But what you now tell me is much more important; advances the case against her to a far more serious point. Upon my word," continued the lawyer, after a pause for further meditation; "upon my word I begin to think that it is the most likely view of the case that this Signorina Paolina Foscarelli has been the assassin. At all events it seems quite as likely a theory as that the Marchese should have done it. Fully as likely," added the lawyer, rubbing his hands

cheerily; "the motive, as motives to such deeds go, is quite as great in her case as in his. Greater, or at least more probable! Jealousy has moved to such acts more frequently than mere considerations of interest."

"To be sure it has," cried Manutoli; "I think that the circumstances bear more conclusively against her than against him; I do, upon my life."

"If only something do not turn up to show that it could not have been done by her, I think—I do think that we have got all that is absolutely necessary for us. For observe, Signor Barone, it is not necessary that she should be convicted. If there is such a probability that she may have been the criminal as to make it impossible to say that it is far more likely that one of the parties suspected should be guilty than the other, there can be no conviction, and our friend is safe."

"But I say that all the probabilities are in favour of the hypothesis that she did the deed," cried Manutoli, warmly.

"Much will depend on the report of Tomosarchi," said the lawyer. "The inquiry arises, how far it was possible for a young girl to do that which was done."

"It is evident that she was murdered in her sleep," observed the Baron.

"It looks like it; it seems clear that there could have been no struggle of any sort. Still, we must hear *how* the murder was done; we must know whether the means were such as might have been in the power of this girl," rejoined Fortini.

"Well, we shall know all that to-morrow. God grant that the Professor's report may be a favourable one," said Manutoli, thinking little of the savageness of his wish as regarded the poor artist. But, to the mind of the Baron, it was a question between one who was a fellow-creature of his own, and one who could hardly be considered such. How was it possible to put in comparison for a moment the consideration of a fellow-noble of his own city and that of a poor unknown foreign artist?

"I trust it may; I build much on the fact that there was no struggle. She was put to death by some means which scarcely allowed her time to wake from the sleep," returned the lawyer. "You are going, then, now, Signor Barone, to see this Paolina?"

"Yes; if I find her still up, which I suppose I shall, for it is not late," said Manutoli, looking at his watch.

“Better be a little cautious in speaking to her, you know ; best to avoid alarming her,” said Fortini.

“The express object of my visit to her is to prevent her from being alarmed,” rejoined the Baron.

“Yes ; but—what I mean is that—it would be desirable, you see, to lead her to speak. What we want now is to know exactly what she did and where she went after seeing the Marchesino and La Bianca in the *bagarino* together. Also to ascertain whether she was seen by anybody to do whatever she did or to go wherever it was she went. And, I think, that you might very probably learn this from her more effectually than I should. She would be more likely to be on her guard with me, you see.”

“I’ll try what I can do ; my real belief is that she is the guilty person,” said Manutoli.

“To-morrow I will see what I can do at St. Apollinare. She cannot have been in the church without seeing and speaking to somebody. There are a Capucin and a lay brother always there, I take it ; we shall see what they can tell us. But I can’t go out there till after the medical examination. I have arranged with my old friend Tomosarchi to be present at it,” said the lawyer.

"I shall be most anxious to hear the result," said the Baron.

"If you will be here about ten o'clock—my breakfast hour—I shall be able to tell you."

"Thanks. *A rivederci dunque*——"

"Stay; one more word before you go, Signor Barone. As we are both engaged in this inquiry, and both interested on the same side, I may as well tell you, perhaps, that there is one other person to whom my attention has been drawn as being open to suspicion in this matter—the Conte Leandro Lombardoni."

"The Conte Leandro! You don't say so! Impossible!"

"Just listen one moment, Signor Barone. It is certain that the Conte Leandro passed out of the city by the Porta Nuova at a very early hour this morning—at an earlier hour than either the girl Paolina or the Marchesino and La Bianca."

"The Conte Leandro—out of the Porta Nuova—at such an hour in the morning. For what possible purpose?"

"Ay, that is the question. For what possible purpose? But the fact is certain. Though endeavouring to conceal himself by means of his cloak, he

was perfectly well recognized by the men at the gate. For what possible purpose? No doubt you know, Signor Barone, much better than I, who am not much in the way of hearing of such things—unless in cases where I make it my business to hear of them, you understand, Signor Barone,—you, no doubt, know that the Signor Conte has been besieging, as I may say, this poor Lalli woman with his attentions and verses ever since she came here; also, that the lady would have nothing to say to him or to his verses—that she has, in short, snubbed him and mortified his vanity in the sight of all the town during the whole of the past Carnival.”

“That is true—it is all true,” cried Manutoli, eagerly, and looking almost scared by the ideas the lawyer was presenting to his mind. “It is even truer than you, perhaps, are aware of. She said sneering and cutting things of him in his hearing both at the Marchese Lamberto’s ball and at the Circolo ball; I happen to know it.”

“Hey—y—y—y?” said the lawyer, uttering a sound like a long sigh, with a question stop at the end of it; and then thrusting out his lips and nodding his head up and down slowly while he plunged his hands into the pockets of his trowsers.

"I'll tell you what it is, Signor Barone," the old man added, after a pause of deep thought, "I was anxious to find such plausible grounds of suspicion against other parties, such elements of doubt, such possibilities as might make it difficult for the judges to condemn our friend. I wanted to puzzle the court; but, *per Bacco*! I have puzzled myself. This afternoon, I confess to you, I had little doubt but that the Marchesino had, in a fatal moment of anger and desperation, committed the crime. But, upon my word now, I know not what to think. Here we have three parties, each of whom we know to have been acted on by one of three strong passions. We have jealousy, and wounded vanity. Which of the three has done the deed?"

"It is an extraordinary circumstance," said the Baron Manutoli, "that they were jeering at the Conte Leandro at the Circolo just now, about the way the Diva had snubbed him and his verses, and accusing him in joke of having been her murderer. And, as sure as I am now speaking to you, Signor Fortini, he looked in a way then that I—a—a—in short that I thought very odd—turned all sorts of colours. But then, you know, he is always such an unwholesome-looking animal."

"One of the vainest men I ever met with," said the lawyer, musing.

"Oh—for vanity—I believe you. Leandro has not his equal for vanity."

"And strong vanity, deeply wounded, by a woman too, will breed a hate as violent and vicious, perhaps, as any passion that ever prompted a crime," rejoined the lawyer, still meditating deeply. "*Per Dio Santo!*" he exclaimed, after a pause of silence, striking his open palm strongly on the table, as he spoke, and speaking with a sort of solemn earnestness, "I am inclined to think, after all, that he is the man. The Marchesino," he went on again, thoughtfully, "went out for a frolic—intelligible enough. The girl went out to look after the preparations for her work—again quite plausible. But in the name of all the saints what took the Conte Leandro out of the Porta Nuova at that hour of the morning, after passing the night at a ball?"

"I still think that the Venetian girl has done the deed," said Manutoli, whose opinion was no doubt in some degree warped by his desire that the criminal should turn out to be a foreign plebeian rather than a Ravenna noble. "After all Leandro is not the man to do such a deed. He is such a poor creature.

Besides, it seems to me that the girl's motive for hate was the stronger. I don't know that wounded vanity has had many such crimes to answer for, whereas jealousy—and such a jealousy—why, it is an old story, you know.”

“ Well, we shall see. Any way, I am very much more easy as to the result. Short of such evidence as it seems very highly unlikely should be forthcoming, I do not think that there can be any conviction at all. It is most extraordinary that in the case of such a deed, done in such a place, at such a time, there should be so many persons so fairly liable to strong suspicion.”

“ Of course, to produce the result we wish, a case must be set up against Leandro ? ” said the Baron.

“ Of course. Leave that to me, or rather to the police. No doubt their inquiries have already put them on his track. The fact of his having gone out of the city by that gate, at that hour, is quite enough.”

“ And now I must be off to see this Signorina Foscarelli. I don't half like the job.”

“ I daresay you will find her easy enough,” said the lawyer, not quite understanding the nature of Manutoli's distaste for his errand. “ Good-night, Signor Barone.”

CHAPTER IX.

THE POST-MORTEM EXAMINATION.

THE Baron Manutoli found Paolina quite as "easy" as the lawyer had imagined that he would find her; but his task was not altogether an easy one in the sense he had himself intended. She made not the slightest difficulty of telling him, that when she had seen Ludovico and Bianca drive past the church towards the forest she had felt a strong temptation to follow them thither; she told him all about the conversation she had had with the old monk, and repeated the directions she had received from him as to the path by which she might reach the Pineta, and return that way towards the city, without coming back into the high-road, till she got near the walls. She confessed that, when she had followed the path behind the church leading to the Pineta, for some little distance, she had changed her mind, and had

turned off by another path, which had brought her back into the high-road not far from the church ; and she said that she had then walked on till she came near the walls, where she turned aside to sit down on one of the benches under the trees of the little promenade ; that she had sat there for some time—she did not know how long ; had then gone in to the Cardinal Legate's chapel, where she had conversed with the Contessa Violante, whom she knew from having often met her there before ; and had at last returned home at a very much later hour than she had expected, and had found her friend Signora Orsola Steno uneasy at her prolonged absence.

“And did you mention to the Contessa the shocking fact of the *prima donna's* death ?” asked Manutoli, suddenly, thinking that he was doing a very sharp bit of lawyerly business in laying this trap for Paolina.

“How was it possible that I should do so, when I knew nothing about it till Ludovico told me several hours later ?” answered the girl, with an unembarrassed easiness and readiness that almost changed Manutoli's opinion as to the probability of her guilt.

He reminded himself, however, that the same woman, who could be capable of such a deed might also

be expected to have the presence of mind and readiness necessary for avoiding any such trap as that which he had laid for her.

He was, at the same time, strongly, but perhaps not altogether consistently, impressed with the fact, that during the whole of his interview with her, she did not once distinctly and directly deny that she had had anything to do with the crime. When warning her, as he had been charged by Ludovico to do, of the probability that she might be arrested, he had allowed her to understand that the circumstances of the case were such, that the question of who was the guilty person became nearly an alternative one between herself and the Marchese. On which, instead of protesting her own innocence, she had strongly insisted on that of Ludovico, which seemed a very suspicious circumstance to the Baron Manutoli.

He had tried to lead her to express some feeling, or, rather, some remembrance of what had been her feeling when she saw Ludovico and La Bianca in the *bagarino* together ; but there she became reticent, and would say little or nothing—another suspicious circumstance in the eyes of the Baron, so that, when he quitted her, he was, upon the whole, rather

confirmed than otherwise in his previous opinion as to her guilt.

“Well, Signorina,” he had said, in rising to leave her, “I came here, in compliance with my friend’s request, to re-assure you on the subject of the warrant which will, in all probability, be issued to-morrow morning for your arrest. You best know whether you have any reason for alarm. My own opinion is, that if you have nothing to reproach yourself with, you have nothing to fear. I trust it may be so.”

“I am grateful to you for coming, Signor,” Paolina said. “You will see Ludovico again. Tell him that I am as sure of his innocence of this horrid thing as if he had never quitted my side.”

How Paolina passed that miserable night it is useless to attempt to tell. How happy all, ay, even all, the days of her previous life seemed to her in comparison with the misery of the minutes that were then so slowly passing.

Early the next morning Signor Fortini called at the house of his friend Dr. Buonaventura Tomosarchi, the great anatomist, for the purpose of accompanying the Professor to the room at the hospital, where the body of Bianca was awaiting the post-mortem

examination which had been ordered by the police.

"I suppose," said Fortini, as they walked together, "that there is no possibility, in such a case as this, that the death may have been a natural one?"

"Oh, I would not say that at all. Such things occur at all ages. I do not think it is likely,—specially in the case of such a magnificent organization as that of yonder poor girl; but there is no saying, and, above all, no use in attempting to guess when we shall so soon know all about it," said the Professor, a man some ten or fifteen years younger than the old lawyer.

"Is it possible that death may have been caused by foul means, yet by such as may elude your investigation?" asked Fortini.

"I think not—I should say almost certainly not in such a case as the present. There are poisons that act subtly and instantaneously, but there is the odour in most cases,—in almost all some indication of their operation on the organization."

Arrived at the hospital they found a couple of assistants, pupils of the Professor, awaiting his arrival. There was also an official on the part of the police, and there were two or three persons waiting in

the hope of being allowed to be present at the examination. The police officer, however, very summarily declared that this could not be permitted. Fortini was so well known, and held such a kind of half-official position and character in the city, that he passed on unquestioned on the arm of the Professor.

The body lay exactly as it had been brought in by the labouring-men who had found it in the Pineta. The beautiful face was perfectly calm, and in the lineaments of it the difference that there is between death and sleep was scarcely perceptible. The white dress was almost as unruffled and as spotless as when she had put it on. It had been fastened about midway between the neck and the waist by a diamond pin or brooch ; but this fastening was now undone, and the brooch was hanging loosely on one side of the bosom of the dress. It was impossible to suppose that this jewel should have been so left by anybody who had had the opportunity and the desire of plunder. It might have been unfastened by the wearer before she slept for the sake of more full enjoyment of the balmy breezes of the pine-forest : and the result of this loosening of the dress was that the light folds of it opened freely as far down as the waist, so that the slightest drawing aside of them,

such as even the breeze might effect, was sufficient to leave bare the entire bosom.

On either shoulder and on the bosom lay the large heavy waves of the rich auburn hair. In death, as she had been in life, she was still a wonder of beauty; and the two men, the old lawyer and the Professor, little as, from years, character, and habits of mind, their imaginations were susceptible of being deeply touched by such a sight, stood for awhile by the side of the table on which the body had been laid, and gazed in sad silence on the sight before them.

"One might think she was still sleeping, poor creature," said the lawyer, after a silence of a few minutes.

"Ay, almost. It is a wonderfully lovely face. Seems difficult to believe, doesn't it, that any man—much less such a man as the Marchese—should have stood over that figure, and so looking down on it, have decided on destroying it?" said the Professor.

"Perhaps no man did so," said the lawyer.

"Case of death from natural causes, you mean? I am afraid not, I am afraid not. Can't say for certain yet; but, judging from appearances, I fear there is no likelihood that such was the case," rejoined the Professor.

"I was not thinking of that," replied Fortini. "I meant that what a man could hardly have had the heart to do might, perhaps, have been done by a woman. Beauty is not, I fancy, always found to produce quite the same sort of effect on another female as it is wont to produce on the other sex."

"Might have been done by a woman? That seems hardly likely, I think, *caro mio*. In the Pineta at that hour of the morning? *Che!* What woman is likely to have been there?"

"Well, we happen to know that there *was* a woman very near the spot where the crime was committed at the time that it was committed."

"You don't say so?" interrupted the anatomist. "Good heavens! This is quite new to me, and, of course, most important. I am delighted to hear what seems to cast so strong a doubt on the guilt of the Marchesino."

"And that is not all. We know further," continued the lawyer, eagerly, "that the woman in question had the strongest of all the possible motives that ever influence a female mind to hate—to desire the death of this poor girl that now lies here. The question is, whether this death was caused by any means

which a woman—a young girl—may be supposed to have used,” said the lawyer.

“Ha! a case of jealousy, I suppose? You don’t mean it. God knows, I should be more glad than I will say if there were any means of showing that the Marchese Ludovico had no hand in the matter. If it were brought home to him it would kill my old friend the Marchese Lamberto outright; I do believe it would kill him.”

“I thought at first, to tell you the truth, Signor Professore, that it must have been the Marchesino who did the deed; the circumstances seemed so terribly strong against him. But—certain facts have come to my knowledge—in short, I begin to have very great hopes that he was in reality wholly innocent of it; and still greater hopes that if we cannot succeed in bringing the crime home to any other party, yet that the difficulty and doubt hanging about the case will be so great that all conviction will be impossible.”

“A woman, you tell me? A young woman, I suppose, from what you say?” said the Professor, inquiringly.

“Yes; a young woman, and, as I am told, a very pretty one—a certain young girl—a Venetian

artist, of the name of Foscarelli—Paolina Foscarelli, with whom it seems the Marchesino was foolish enough to fall in love. Well, this girl sees the Marchese and Bianca driving out alone together at that time in the morning to the Pineta—that much we know—sees them cheek by jowl together in a little *bagarino*, doing heaven only knows what—biling and cooing. Now it seems to me that she would, under these circumstances, be likely to feel not altogether kindly towards the lady in possession, eh, Signor Professore? You know the nature of the creatures better than I do; what do *you* think about it?”

“Similar little accidents have produced as terrible results before now—ay, many a time, there is no denying that. If we can ascertain *how* the deed was done it will be likely enough to throw some light on the probabilities of the case,” returned the Professor, proceeding to scrutinize carefully the body as it lay before in any way disturbing the position or the garments.

“Ha! what have we here?” he cried, as he perceived, and, at the same time, pointed out the existence of a very small red spot upon the white dress just above the waistband. In an instant, as he

spoke, he whipped out a powerful magnifying-glass, and carefully examined the tell-tale spot by its aid.

“ Yes, that is a spot of blood—blood sure enough ! but it is very singular that there should be such a minute spot, and no more ; no, I can find no further trace,” he added, after a careful and minute examination of every part of the dress.

“ Might not any trifling accident—the most insignificant thing in the world—produce such a mere spot as that—a scratched finger—either her own or another person’s ? ” asked the lawyer.

“ Well, hardly so ; a slight stain might easily be so caused ; but hardly a round spot like that. That spot must have been caused by a small drop falling on that place—not by the muslin having been brought into contact with any portion of blood, however small. How could that one little round drop of blood have come there ? ” said the anatomist, thoughtfully. “ It is singular enough.”

Then, when the dress had been removed preparatory to the examination of the body, the Professor himself and his assistants minutely searched every part of it—in vain. There was no other, even the smallest, mark of blood to be found.

“Are you sure that that spot *is* blood?” asked the lawyer.

“Are you sure whether a deed *is* signed or *is not* signed when you see it?” retorted the anatomist. “Yes; that spot has been caused by a drop of blood falling there—a very minute drop. Of that there can be no doubt. And now we must proceed to examine the body externally. If there should be nothing to be learned from that, we must see what revelations the knife may bring to light.”

And then the Professor, aided by his pupils, proceeded to institute a minute and careful examination of the body.

At the first sight it appeared to be as unblemished in every part of it as Nature’s choicest and most perfect handiwork could be. So little did a mere cursory view suggest the possibility that life would have been destroyed by any external violence, that the Professor was about to take the necessary steps for ascertaining what light could be thrown on the manner of her death by the internal condition of the different portions of the organism, when the sharper eyes of one of the young assistants were drawn to a very slight indication, which he immediately pointed out to his superior.

The appearance in question consisted of a very small round white spot, around which there was a slight equally circular redness. It was situated nearly in the middle of the body, just below the meeting of the ribs on the chest, about a broad hand's breadth above the waistband — in such a position, in short, as to be very nearly at the point where the neck-opening of the dress ceased.

No second glance was needed, as soon as the Professor's attention had been called to this appearance, to ensure the riveting of his attention on it. Nor was much examination necessary to convince him that he had now, in truth, discovered the cause and the means of death.

The slight mark in question was, in fact, the trace of a wound inflicted by a very fine needle, which had pierced the heart, and, having caused immediate death, had been left in the wound, ingeniously hidden by means which it needed a second look to discover.

The effect of this discovery on the Professor was singular. He seemed taken aback by it, and, one would have said, alarmed at it, in a manner which it seemed difficult for Signor Fortini to account for.

“What is it astonishes you so, Signor Pro-

fessore," said he; "surely you were prepared to find that a murder had been done? I never had any doubt of it; and why not in that way as well as another? And a very ingenious mode of inflicting death in a quiet way it seems to be."

"Yes, indeed. The fact is that I was struck by——"

The Professor broke off speaking suddenly with a start; and darted a quick alarmed glance at the face of Signor Fortini, who did not fail to remark it, and to be much puzzled by the Professor's manner.

The latter, while he had been speaking, had stooped to examine the minute trace of the wound closely, and had put his finger on the spot; and it was on doing so that he had interrupted himself, and shown renewed symptoms of surprise and dismay. What this closer examination had shown him was the fact that an infinitesimally small portion of white wax had been very neatly and carefully introduced into the orifice of the wound, in such a manner as to prevent all effusion of blood, and almost to escape the observation of the naked eye.

"Why, one would say you were a novice at this sort of thing, Tomosarchi, you seem so much affected

by it," said the lawyer; "what is it that moves you so? Why, you are as pale, man, as if you were bringing to light a crime of your own instead of somebody else's."

"Ah! not that exactly. No, but it is a very singular thing. One would say that this death must have been caused by some one who had some little knowledge of anatomy, or, at least, had been put up to the trick by some one else who possessed such knowledge," said the Professor, recovering himself with an effort.

"And that is what our friend the Marchesino Ludovico is most assuredly innocent of. I take note of your remark, Signor Professore," said the lawyer.

"But one would think, that all the other persons on whom it is possible that suspicion might rest, must be equally void of any such knowledge," returned Tomosarchi.

"How do we know that? How can I tell what strange odds and ends of knowledge this Venetian artist may have picked up. Artists,—they have constantly more or less acquaintance with medical students, and such like. Some knowledge of anatomy is needful to them in their business. For my part, it seems to me very likely that this girl might have

such knowledge as would teach her so easy a way of getting rid of her rival. Then you will observe that very little physical strength was needed for the infliction of such a wound. It might have been done perfectly easily by the hand of a young girl. I declare it seems to me that the result of your examinations tends to make it more probable than ever that the Venetian is the criminal."

"Well, it may be so. Certain it is, that no degree of strength beyond what she, or any other such person could have exerted, was needed for giving that death to a sleepy person. But it is equally clear that a certain amount of special knowledge was required for the purpose," rejoined the anatomist. "And now," added he; "I must draw up my report. *A rivederci*, Signor Fortini! *A rivederci*, *Signori*!"

"One word more, Signor Professore, before I leave you," said the lawyer; "is the special knowledge you speak of, such as—any member of your profession we will say—would be possessed of."

"Well, I should not say that it was likely such a method of concealing a crime would have suggested itself to such an one, more than to another. It is the clever invention of one who meditated murder.

But, I may say at once to you, what I shall have to say in due season to the magistrates, that the trick is not a new one. I have heard of such a thing before now."

"But not as a common thing," pursued the lawyer.

"Quite the reverse—as a very strange and peculiar thing," replied the Professor.

"And when did you hear of a case of murder committed in this strange and peculiar manner?" persisted the lawyer.

The Professor shot a sharp quick glance at the lawyer's face; and his own flushed red as he replied, "Ay—if I could remember that—but it is a reported case; anybody may have read it. A murder was committed by similar means in the Island of Sardinia, not very long ago!"

"Not very long ago," reiterated the lawyer, musingly.

"No, not very long ago; but the case has been reported, I tell you. Anybody may have read it."

"Humph," said the lawyer, as he turned to go, with his mind evidently busily at work both on the strange sort of confusion that had been visible in the

Professor's manner, and on the circumstances he had elicited from him.

"I'll tell you what," said one of the young students to the other, while they were engaged in preparing to consign the body of the murdered woman to the police. "I'll tell you what: I'll be blessed if I don't think the governor knows, or has a shrewd guess, who it is has done this job. Did you mark the way he looked, and went as pale as death, when I showed him the place?"

"Bah, nonsense! He was vexed that he had not seen it himself. How should he know anything about it?"

"I don't know how; but I know him, and his ways," said the first speaker.

"But if he thinks he has any guess at the murderer, why don't he say it at once?" asked the younger lad.

"Ah, yes, I think so; I should like to see him at it. That's not his business, that's the lawyer's business. You may depend on his keeping his own secret, if he has got one. The governor likes quiet sailing in still water, he does. But if he did not see something more in this little bit of steel and atom of wax, that have stopped a life so cleverly, than the

mere things themselves and the effect of them,—why, then, I know nothing about old Buonaventura Tomosarchi, that's all."

"How see something more?" said the younger lad, open-eyed.

"Saw who put 'em there, Ninny. It is not everybody who could be up to such a dodge; and I feel sure the governor could make a shrewd guess who did that clever trick.

CHAPTER X.

PUBLIC OPINION.

THE post-mortem examination had taken place at an early hour, before the members of the idler portion of the society of the city had come forth from their homes. An Italian idler—one of the class who, in common Italian phrase, are able to “*fare vita beata*,” to lead a happy life, *i.e.* to do nothing whatever from morning till night—an Italian of that favoured class never passes his hours in his own house, or dwelling, of whatever kind it may be. As soon as he is up and dressed he goes out into the city to enjoy the air and sunshine if it be fine weather, to saunter in cafés or at the Circolo, if it rain.

Professor Tomosarchi and lawyer Fortini had been earlier afoot, and the scene described in the last

chapter had passed, and the general results of the examination were beginning to be known in the city, when the *jeunesse dorée* of Ravenna began to assemble at the Circolo. It was known also by that time that the young Venetian artist, with whom Ludovico was well known to be on intimate terms of some kind or other, had been arrested at her lodging at an early hour that morning, on suspicion of having been concerned in the murder of La Bianca.

Of course that terrible event continued more than ever to occupy the attention of all Ravenna, almost to the exclusion of every other topic of conversation. It was very easy to understand the nature of the motive, which might be supposed to have led Paolina to do the deed. And when it became known further, that the means by which the death of the victim had been brought about were such as might easily have been accomplished by the weakest woman's hand ; and that it had been discovered that Paolina had been in the Pineta—for such was the not quite accurate form which the report assumed—just about the time when the crime must have been committed, the general opinion inclined very much to the notion that she, the stranger from Venice, was, indeed, the assassin.

Precedents were hunted up, and many a story told

of women who had done equally desperate deeds under similar provocation.

"I feel very little doubt of it, myself," said Manutoli; "there is nothing improbable in such a solution, while it is in the highest degree improbable that Ludovico should have raised his hand against a sleeping woman, enticed by him in the forest for the purpose. Bah! It is monstrous."

"He would have been more to be pitied than blamed if he had done it," said another of the young men, who did not bear himself a reputation of the most brilliant sort; "if I had a rich uncle I swear by all the saints, that I would not let the prettiest woman, that ever made a fool of a man, come between me and my inheritance."

"Ludovico was not the man to have done it any way. Besides, the mischief had not been done; it was only a project talked of. There might have been a hundred ways of breaking off so absurd a match. It would have been time to have recourse to *les grands moyens*, when the thing had been done, and all else had failed. To my notion jealousy has done it."

"So say I. Two to one I bet that it turns out that the Venetian girl has done the trick."

"But have you heard, all of you, that there is a

third horse in the field ? ” said the Marchese Faraoni, whose *palazzo* was close to the house in which the Conte Leandro lived ; “ there is another candidate for the galleys. Has nobody heard that our poet was arrested before he was out of bed this morning ? ”

“ What ! Leandro ? ”

“ The Conte Lombardoni ? ”

“ No ! ”

“ You don’t mean that ? ”

“ What, arrested for this murder of La Bianca ? ”

“ Impossible ! ”

“ But quite true, nevertheless. Anybody can easily assure themselves of the fact by walking as far as the Palazzo del Governo.”

“ Leandro arrested on suspicion of murder ? Well, I think the tragedy is passing into a farce.”

“ It will be fatal to Leandro. He will die of fright, if no other evil happens to him.”

“ Think of the cantos of verse he will make on it.”

“ He will die singing, like a swan.”

“ But do you know anything about it, Faraoni ? Have you any idea how he has come to be implicated in the matter ? ”

“ I learnt at his own lodging that he did not

come home to bed the night of the ball, but was absent from home at the time the murder must have been committed. And then I was told that the men at the Porta Nuova had declared that they had seen him pass out of the city going in the direction of the Pineta at a very early hour that morning."

"*Per Bacco!* it is very strange. What, in the name of all the saints, could he be doing out there at that time, when all honest folks were in their beds?"

"Remember all the snubbing he has had from the poor Diva all through carnival. By Jove! it looks very queer."

"Do you remember how he turned all sorts of colours here last night, when we were talking of it?"

"And how anxious he seemed to say everything that appeared to make it bear hard upon Ludovico?"

"Yes, and contradicted himself. First, he knew about it, and then he knew nothing."

"*Per Dio!* I don't know what to think of it."

"So, then, there are now three persons suspected—Ludovico, and the Venetian girl, and the Conte Leandro?"

"And all three were not far from the spot where the deed was done, and all three had motives, more or less credible, for doing it."

“Ludovico, because his uncle was going to marry the woman, which would have cut him out of his inheritance; the Venetian girl, because she loved Ludovico, and saw him making love to the poor Diva; and Leandro, because she snubbed him, and laughed at him, and would have nothing to say to either him or his verses.”

“And the one certain thing is, that the unlucky Diva lies dead, and was murdered by somebody. Upon my life, it is the queerest thing I ever heard of.”

“What do you think of it, Manutoli?” said one of the speakers in the foregoing dialogue to the Baron, who was an older man than most of the others there.

“My notion is that the girl is the guilty party,” said Manutoli. “As for Leandro, it seems too absurd. I don’t think he has courage enough to kill a cat. Besides, I daresay he hated La Bianca quite enough to slander her, and backbite, and that sort of thing; but murder——”

“She made fun of him. Leandro don’t like to be laughed at,—specially by the women, and, more specially still, when other fellows are by to hear it; and then those poets are always such desperate

fellows. I should not wonder——” said one of the younger men.

In the meantime, while talk of this sort was going on at the Circolo, Signor Fortini was on his way out to St. Apollinare in Classe, according to the intention he had expressed on the preceding evening; but he was not making the expedition alone. Signor Pietro Logarini, the Papal Commissioner of Police, was bound on the same errand. The old lawyer, as he passed under the gateway of the Porta Nuova in his comfortable calèche, overtook Signor Logarini, who was about to proceed to St. Apollinare on foot, and who had paused at the gate for the purpose of making some inquiries of the officials there.

“ Good morning, Signor Pietro. I suppose we are bound for the same place; will you permit me to offer you a seat in my carriage?” said the lawyer.

“ Thanks, Signor Giovacchino, I shall be glad of the lift. Yes, I suppose we are about the same business, and a bad one it is. I was making a few inquiries at the gate; but I don’t see that there is much to be gleaned there,” said the Commissary, as he got into the lawyer’s carriage.

“ Well, it seems to me that we have reaped a

pretty good harvest there already," returned the lawyer.

"Enough to make the matter one of the most puzzling I ever had to do with," returned the Commissary. "You have heard, I suppose, that we have arrested the girl Paolina Foscarelli, and the Conte Leandro Lombardoni?"

"No; but it was a matter of course that you would do so—specially the girl," said the lawyer.

"We could not avoid arresting the Conte also; it is so unaccountable that he should have been going out of the city, and so near the place of the crime."

"What account does he give of the matter himself?" asked the lawyer.

"No very clear one; and he seems to be frightened out of his senses; but that proves nothing. One man takes a thing coolly, another is so flushed that you would think he was guilty only to look at him; but there is little to be judged from such appearances. I don't much think the Conte had anything to do with it, for my part."

"What were you asking about at the gate?"

"Well, I thought I would just ascertain if any other parties had passed the gate that same morning," said the Commissary.

“Others ! Have we not enough to make a sufficient puzzle already ?” said Fortini.

“Yes, indeed ; but information is always useful. The men say that they are quite sure that no other person of any kind whatever passed the gate either outwards or inwards, during the night till the Conte Leandro passed in the morning ; and then the girl not long afterwards ; and then the Marchesino with the *prima donna*.”

The lawyer remained plunged in thought for some minutes, as the carriage rolled over the flat dismal-looking road towards the old church ; and then he said, shaking his head, and pouting out his lips,—

“I think we shall find, Signor Pietro, that that girl has done it. There’s nothing a jealous woman will not do. We shall find, I think, that to have been the case ; that is, if we succeed in finding out anything at all. Perhaps the most likely thing is that we may never know what hand did the deed.”

“Oh, come, I hope better things than that. That would not suit our book at all. We must find it out, if we can ; and it is early days yet to talk of being beat. We are not half at the end of our

means of investigation yet, Signor Giovacchino," said the Commissary.

"It may be that something may be to be picked up at the church here."

"And then I must go on to the farm-house, where the Marchesino and the *prima donna* left their carriage."

"We'll have a talk with the friars first."

As Fortini spoke the carriage drew up at the west front of the desolate old basilica. It was a fine spring morning, and by the time the lawyer and the Commissary reached the church, the sun had dissipated the mist, and it was warm and pleasant.

The great doors of the church stood yawningly open as usual, and the gate of iron rail was ajar. And at the south-western corner of the building, just where the sun-ray from the south-west made a sharp line against the black shadow cast by the western front of the building, an old Franciscan was sitting; not Father Fabiano, but his sole companion, Friar Simone, the lay brother.

Neither Signor Fortini nor the police Commissary had ever seen the old guardian of the Basilica; but they were sufficiently instructed in the details of Franciscan costume to perceive at once that the

figure before them was not a priest, but only a lay brother.

“Is there any place, *frate*, where I can put my horse and carriage under shelter for half an hour or so?” said the lawyer, as the old friar, having risen from his seat in the sunshine, came forward towards the carriage.

“There is place enough and to spare, Signori,” said the old man, pointing with a languid and weary-like gesture to the huge pile of half-dilapidated conventual buildings on the southern side of the church; “you can put horse and carriage as they stand into the old barn there, without undoing a buckle. I will open the door for your lordships, if it will hang together so that it can be opened.”

The lawyer and the Commissary dismounted from the carriage, and the former proceeded to lead his horse into the huge barn of the convent; while the latter employed himself in observing every detail of the surrounding localities with those rapid all-seeing and all-remembering glances that the habits and education of his profession had rendered a part of his nature, preparatory to the investigations they had both come to make.

CHAPTER XI.

IN FATHER FABIANO'S CELL.

"You can enter the Basilica at your pleasure, Signori ; the gate is unlocked," said the lay brother, indicating the entrance to the church with a half-formed gesture of his hand, which fell to his side again when he had half raised it, as if the effort of extending his arm horizontally had been too much for him. It was a matter of course to him that any human beings who came to St. Apollinare could have no business there but to see the old walls, which he, the friar, would have given so much never to see again.

"We will do so presently," said Signor Logarini, in reply ; "but, in the first place, we wish to speak with Father Fabiano—he is the *custode* of the church, is he not ?"

"Father Fabiano is ill a-bed, Signor ; I am only

out of my bed since yesterday, and it is as much as I can do to crawl. There's not many days in the year, I think, that we are both well ; and if we should be both down together, God help us. It is not just the healthiest place in the world, this."

"What is the matter with the *padre* ? Has he been ill long ?" asked the lawyer, with a glance at the Commissary.

"Since yesterday afternoon. Why, I tell you I was in bed yesterday ; he down, I must turn out. Ah—h—h ! it 'll all be over one of these days."

"But what ails the *custode* ?" asked Signor Logarini again.

"Fever and ague, I suppose ; that is what is always killing both of us more or less. Pity it is so slow about it !" muttered the lay brother, returning to his seat in the sunshine.

"But I suppose that Father Fabiano is not so ill but that we can speak with him ? It is important that we should do so," said the Commissary, eyeing the friar with a suspicious glance.

"There is nothing to prevent you or anybody else going to him that choose to do so—nothing to prevent any one of those cattle doing so, for that matter. There is neither bolt nor latch ; you can go

into his chamber, if you are so minded," returned the lay brother, rather surlily.

"Will you go and tell him that—Signor Fortini from Ravenna wishes to speak with him, and would be obliged by his permission to come into his room for a few minutes. We don't wish to disturb him more than is necessary."

"I'll tell him—though you might as well go to him yourselves at once for that matter; it is weary work going up the stairs so often—and I can hardly crawl."

And, so saying, the poor old lay brother tottered off to one of the numerous doorless entrances of the half-ruined mass of building, and set himself wearily to climb a small stair, the foot of which was just within it.

The lawyer and the Commissary looked at each other; and the latter said, with a wink at his companion,—

"I thought it better, you see, to say nothing about the Commissary of Police; it would have frightened the old fellow out of his wits; and it is always time enough to let him know who we are if he won't speak without. But I know these animals of friars, Signor Giovacchino, I know them well; and

there isn't a man or woman, townsman or countryman, noble or peasant, that I wouldn't rather have to deal with than a monk or a friar. Let 'em so much as smell the scent of a layman in any position of authority, and it makes 'em as obstinate and contradictory and contrary as mules, and worse. If this old fellow here has got anything to hide, you'll see that we shall not be able to get it out of him."

"But I don't see what interest or wish he can have to hide anything from us," said Fortini.

"N—n—no; one don't see that he should have; but one can't be too suspicious, *mio buono Signor Giovacchino*," said the police authority; "and then, what does he mean by being ill?" he added, after a little thought; "he was well yesterday. It looks to me very much as if he did not want to be questioned."

"I should not think that he can have much to tell. We shall see whether his account confirms the story of the girl as to what took place in the church. But the probability is that that part of her tale is all true enough. The question is what did she do with herself during all those hours that elapsed between the time she quitted the church and the time

when she reached her home? And I have little hope that the friar should be able to throw any light upon that," said the lawyer.

"We shall see; here comes the lay brother. Ugh! what a life it must be to live in such a place as this from one year's end to the other; nothing but a *frate* could stand it," said the Commissary, looking upon the desolation around him with infinite disgust.

"Father Fabiano is not much fit to speak to anybody; the cold fit of the ague is very strong upon him. But if you choose to go up to him you can—specially as there is nothing to stop you. He is in the right-hand cell on the first landing-place up that staircase," said the lay brother, feebly pointing to the entrance, from which he had come out.

The lawyer and the police official followed the indications thus given them, and found, as old Simone had said, that there was neither bolt, lock, nor latch to prevent any creature that could push a door on its hinges, from entering the little bare-walled room in which the friar lay beneath a heavy quilted coverlet on a little narrow pallet.

There was not so much as a single chair in the

room. The walls were clean, and freshly white-washed ; and the brick floor was also clean. There were a few pegs of deal in the wall on the side of the cell opposite to the doorway, on which some garments were hanging ; and on the wall facing the bed there was a large, rudely carved, and yet more rudely painted crucifix. By the side of the bed nearest the door there hung, on a nail driven into the wall, a copper receptacle for holy water, the upper part of which was ornamented with a figure of St. Francis in the act of receiving the "Stigmata," in *repoussé* work, by no means badly executed. And pasted on the bare wall, immediately above the pillow of the little bed, was a coloured print of the cheapest and vilest description, representing the Madonna with the seven legendary poignards sticking in her bosom, and St. Francis, supported on either side by a friar of his order, kneeling at her feet.

These objects formed absolutely the entire furniture of the cell. There was nothing else whatsoever in the room ; neither the smallest fragment of a looking-glass, nor any means or preparation for ablution whatsoever.

The old monk lay on his back in the bed, with his head propped rather highly on a hard straw

bolster ; and the extreme attenuation of his body was indicated by the very slight degree in which the clothes that covered him were raised above the level of the bedstead. On the coverlet upon his chest, there was a rosary of large beads turned out of box-wood. The parts of each bead nearest to the string and in contact with each other were black with the undisturbed dirt and dust of many years. But the protuberant circumference of each wooden ball was polished to a rich shining orange-colour by the constant handling of the fingers.

It seemed both to Signor Fortini and to the Commissary, that there could be no doubt about it, that the old man was really ill. He was lying in his frock of thick brown woollen, and the cowl of it was drawn over his head. He seemed to be suffering from cold, and his teeth were audibly chattering in his head ; and his thin, thin claw-like hands shook as they clutched his crucifix. His face was lividly pale, and his eyes gleamed out from under the cowl with a restless feverish brightness.

That he was ill could hardly be doubted. And it seemed to the lawyer and the Commissary as well as to the old lay brother, natural enough to suppose that a man who fell ill at St. Apollinare was ill with fever

and ague. But whether that were really the nature of his malady, his visitors had not sufficient medical knowledge to judge ; but it was probable enough that the aged monk had had quite sufficient experience of fever and ague, to know pretty well himself, whether he were suffering from that cause or not.

“ We are sorry to find you ill, father,” said Fortini ; “ and though we have come from Ravenna on purpose to speak with you, we would not have disturbed you if our business had not been important. Are you suffering much now ? ”

“ Not much more than usual,” said the sick man, shutting his eyes, while his pallid lips continued to move, as he muttered to himself an “ Ave Maria.”

“ And can you give us your attention for a few minutes ? ” rejoined the lawyer.

“ I will answer to your asking as far as I can ; but — my head is confused, and I don’t remember much clearly about anything. It seems to me as if I had been lying on this bed for months and months,” replied the old friar.

“ And yet, you know, you were up and well yesterday morning, when you were with the young girl who came to copy the mosaics, you know, on the scaffolding in the church ? ” said the lawyer.

“ Yes ; I was with the girl—Paolina Foscarelli, a Venetian—on the scaffolding. Was it yesterday ? ”

“ Yesterday it was that she was here. Yesterday morning. And it is hardly necessary to ask you if you know what happened here in the Pineta much about that time, or shortly afterwards. You have heard of the murder, of course ? ”

So violent a trembling seized on the aged man as the lawyer spoke thus, that he was unable to answer a word. His old hands shook so that he could hardly hold the beads in his fingers, while his chattering teeth and trembling lips tried to formulate the words of a prayer.

“ Did you, or did you not hear that a dreadful murder was committed yesterday morning in the Pineta not far from this place ? ” said the Commissary, speaking for the first time, and in a less kindly manner than the old lawyer had used.

A redoubled access of teeth - chattering and shivering was for some time the only result elicited by this question. The old friar shook in every limb ; and the beads of the rosary rattled in his trembling fingers, as he attempted to pass them on their string in mechanically habitual accompaniment to the invocations his lips essayed to mutter.

"It is a terrible thing to speak of truly, father ; and we are sorry to be obliged to distress you by forcing such a subject on your thoughts ; but it is our duty to make these inquiries ; and you can tell us the few facts—they cannot be many or of much importance—which have come to your knowledge on the subject," said the lawyer, speaking in more gentle accents.

"I heard nothing ; but I saw," said the aged man, closing his eyes, as if to shut out the vision which was forced back upon his imagination ; and fumbling nervously with his beads, while his pale blue lips trembled with mutterings of mechanically repeated ejaculations.

"Take your time, *padre mio*," said the lawyer gently, making a gesture with his raised hand, at the same time, to repress the less patient eagerness of the Commissary of Police ; "we do not want to hurry you. Tell us what it was that you saw."

CHAPTER XII.

THE CASE AGAINST PAOLINA.

THE old friar opened his haggard eyes, which gleamed out with a feverish light from the bottom of their sockets, and from under the shadow of his cowl, and looked piteously up into the lawyer's face. "A little time—a moment to collect my thoughts," he said, passing his parched tongue over the still dryer parchment-like skin of his drawn lips, and painfully swaying his cowed head from one side of the hard pillow to the other, while large drops of perspiration gathered on his brow.

The Commissary shot a meaning glance across the pallet on which the old man lay, to the lawyer, in evident anticipation of the importance of the revelation, heralded by so much of painful emotion.

"By all means, *padre mio*; collect your thoughts.

We are sorry for the necessity which obliges us to force your mind back on such painful ones," said the lawyer, laying his hand on that of the friar, which was still fumbling with the shining box-wood beads, scarcely more yellow than the claw-like fingers which held them. "You saw——?"

Still no reply came from the old friar's lips. He writhed his body in the bed, and the manifestation of his agony became more and more intense. The eager impatient air of the Commissary changed itself into one of persistent dogged determination; and he quietly drew from his pocket a note-book and the means of writing in it.

"Now, father, you will be able to tell us what you saw?" said the lawyer in a soothing coaxing voice.

"I saw," said the old friar at length, speaking with his eyes again closed—"I saw the dead body of the woman who had passed the church towards the Pineta in the morning, brought back by six men from the forest. They passed by the western front of the church, and I saw that the body was the body of the woman I speak of."

The Commissary shut up his note-book with a gesture of provoked disappointment, and shrugged his shoulders impatiently.

“ If that is all you have to tell us, *frate*, you need not have made so much difficulty about it,” he said ; “ we knew all that before, and need not have come here to be told it. Plenty of people saw the bringing in from the forest of the body of the murdered woman, and would give evidence to the fact without making so much ado about it. Is that all you saw ? ”

“ Did you not see,” said the lawyer, again motioning his companion to be patient ; “ did you not see another young woman in the forest yesterday morning ? ”

“ Not in the forest,” replied the friar without any difficulty. “ Not in the forest ; I saw another young woman here yesterday, but it was in the church. She came here to make copies of some of the mosaics. I had been previously told to expect such an one.”

“ Did she come to the church before the time when you saw the other lady pass towards the forest ? ” asked the lawyer.

“ Yes ; about half an hour or more before,” answered the friar.

“ And where was she when the second lady passed, going towards the Pineta ? ” asked the lawyer again.

“ She was on the scaffolding in the church, which

had been prepared for her to make her copies of the mosaics."

"Do you know whether she saw, or was aware that the second lady had passed the church to go towards the Pineta?"

"I know that she was aware of it; I was with her on the scaffolding. We both together saw the woman who was afterwards brought back dead pass in a *bagarino* with the Marchese Ludovico di Castelmare, towards the Pineta."

The lawyer looked hard at the Commissary; and the latter in obedience, as it seemed, to the look, took out his note-book again, and made a note of the friar's declaration.

"And what did the young lady who came to copy the mosaics do afterwards? Where did you part with her?" resumed the lawyer.

"She left the church, and walked in the direction of the forest. I parted from her at the door of the church."

"And did you see her any more in the course of that morning?" asked the lawyer again.

"I did not: I saw her no more from that time to this," replied the friar. During the whole of this interrogation, he had appeared far less distressed

and disturbed than he had been before speaking of his having seen the body of La Bianca carried past the church towards the city. He had answered all the questions concerning Paolina readily and without hesitation.

"I don't think we need trouble you any further, *frate*," said the Commissary. "I hope that you will soon get over your touch of fever; and then, if we need you, there will be no difficulty in your attending, when wanted, in the city. I don't see, that there is anything more to be got at present," he added, addressing the lawyer.

So the two visitors bade the friar adieu, and went down the stairs on to the open piazza in front of the church.

"Does that fellow know anything more than he tells us?" said the Commissary, as they stepped out of the narrow entry on to the green sward of the piazza.

"I fancy not; I don't see much what he is at all likely to know," replied the lawyer.

"Nor I; but his manner was so remarkable. One would have said that he was conscious of having committed the murder himself. In all my experience I never saw a man so hard put to it to tell a plain and simple fact."

“Well, the poor old fellow is ill, you see. And then, no doubt, the sight of the body brought back out of the forest made a terrible impression on him. The extreme seclusion, tranquillity, and monotony of his life here, the absence from year’s end to year’s end of any sort of emotion of any kind, would naturally have the result of increasing the painful effect which such an event and such a sight would have upon him. My own notion is that there is nothing further to be got out of him.”

“There is our friend the lay brother sitting in the sunshine just where we left him. We might as well just see what he can tell us before going back to the city.”

“He seems very ill, the *padre*,” pursued the Commissary, addressing himself to brother Simone, as he and the lawyer lounged up to the spot where he was sitting; “the fever must have laid hold of him very suddenly; for it seems he was well enough yesterday morning.”

“That is the way with the *maledetto morbo*,” returned the lay brother; “one hour you are well—as well, that is to say, as one can ever be in such a place as this—and the next you are down on your back shivering and burning like—like the poor souls

•

in purgatory. Doubtless the more of it one has had, the less there is to come. That's the only comfort."

"The *padre's* mind seems to have been very painfully affected by the sight of the body of the woman, who was murdered in the forest, as it was being carried back to the city. Did you see it too?" asked the lawyer, observing the friar narrowly, as he spoke.

"Sì, Signor, I saw it too, and a piteous sight it was. Father Fabiano and I were both out here on the *piazza* when the body was carried past. For I was just coming from the belfry yonder, where I had been to ring Compline; and the *padre* was at the same time coming out of the church, where he had been as usual with him at that hour, at his devotions before the altar of the Saint."

"Then at the hour of Compline the father had not yet been taken ill?" observed the Commissary.

"*Scusi*, Signor; I think he had been struck by the fever at that time. He fell a-shivering and a-shaking so that he could hardly stand, when the body was carried past. But that is the way the mischief always begins. Ah, there's never a doctor knows it better than I do, and no wonder."

“You don’t think then,” said the lawyer, “that it was the sight of the dead body that moved him so?”

“Why should it?” said the lay brother, in the true spirit of monastic philosophy; “why should it? all flesh is grass; there is nothing so strange in death. He sighed and groaned a deal, but that is often Father Fabiano’s way when he comes out from his exercises in the church. He seemed as if he could hardly stand on his legs: but, bless you, that was the fever. He took to his bed as soon as ever the men carrying the body were out of sight. He’s an old man is Father Fabiano.”

“Where had he been all the time between the time when the painter lady left the church, and the hour of Compline?” asked the Commissary, who had been busily thinking during the lay brother’s moralizings.

“Ever since a little after the Angelus he had been on his knees at the altar of St. Apollinare, according to his custom. He told me so, when he came to give me my potion; for I was down with the fever yesterday morning.”

“Do you know where he was before the Angelus?” returned the Commissary.

"He had to ring the Angelus himself, seeing that I was down with the fever. And he came back to the convent in a hurry, fearing that he was too late. There's very little doubt that it was heating himself that way that made the fever take hold of him."

"Where was he hurrying back from, then? Where had he been?" asked the Commissary, endeavouring to hide his eagerness for the reply to this question under a semblance of carelessness.

"He told me, when he came to my cell, that he had been into the forest; and it was plain to see that the walk had been too much for him; he's too old for moving much now, is Father Fabiano."

"He had been into the forest; and when he came back at the hour of the Angelus, he seemed quite overcome by his walk?" said the Commissary, recapitulating, and taking out his note-book as he spoke.

"Yes, he did; so much so, that as I lay on my bed and listened to the Angelus bell a-going, I thought to myself that the old man had hardly the strength to pull the rope," said the lay brother.

"Hardly strength to pull the rope," repeated the Commissary, as he completed the note he was scribbling in his note-book. "Well, I hope he will soon get over his attack of fever. I think we need not trouble you any further at present, *frate*—what is your name, my friend?"

"Simone, by the mercy of God, lay brother of the *terz' ordine*——"

"That will do, *frate* Simone," interrupted the Commissary, adding a word to the entry in his note-book. "Now, Signor Giovacchino, if you are ready, I think we may get your carriage out of the barn and go back to Ravenna."

"We have not got much for our pains, I am afraid," said the lawyer to the Commissary of police as they began to leave the Basilica behind them on their way back to the city.

"Humph!" said the Commissary, who was apparently too much absorbed in his own meditations to be in a mood for conversation.

"Signor Giovacchino," he said, suddenly, after they had traversed nearly half their short journey in silence, "my belief is that your young friend the Marchese had no hand in this matter."

"I am convinced he had not," said the lawyer,

who was, however, very far from having reached any conviction of the kind; "but what we want is some such probable theory on the subject as shall compete successfully with the theory of his guilt in the matter."

"That theory—shall I give it you? It is not only a theory; it is my firm belief as to the facts of the case."

"You suspect——"

"I more than suspect—I am very strongly persuaded that this murder has been committed by the girl Paolina Foscarelli."

"My own notion——"

"Look here, this is how it has been. The Marchese Ludovico has made love to this girl—has made her in love with him—taking the matter *au grand sérieux*, in the way girls will—specially, I am told, it is the way with those Venetian women. Well, by ill chance, as the devil would have it, she sees her lover starting on a *tête-à-tête* expedition into the Pineta with this other girl—just the woman of all others in the world, as I am given to understand, to be a dangerous rival, and to excite a deadly jealousy. This much we have in evidence. Further, we know that the girl Paolina was expected to return from her

expedition to St. Apollinare early in the morning—say at nine o'clock, or thereabouts—whereas she did not return till several hours afterwards. In addition to all this, we have now ascertained that when she left the church she did not set out on her return towards the city, as she might naturally be expected to have done ; but, on the contrary, went in the direction of the Pineta. Then, assuming the story told by the Marchese to be true, we know that, about the very time that this Paolina was entering the forest, her rival was lying asleep and alone there in the immediate neighbourhood. We know that the means adopted for the perpetration of the crime were such as to be quite within a woman's physical power, and that the weapon used for the purpose such as a woman may much more readily be supposed to have about her than a man ; what do you say to that as a theory of the facts ? Is not the evidence overpoweringly strong against this Venetian ? ”

“ Of course my own attention had been called to the case of suspicion against her. But I confess I had not been struck by the last circumstance you mention ; and it seems to me a very strong one. How can it be supposed that a man—a man like the Marchese Ludovico—should chance to have a needle

about him? The case of suspicion against him, mark, altogether excludes the notion that he went out *prepared* to take the life of this unfortunate woman. It is suggested that he put her to death in order to escape from the ruin that would have ensued from his uncle's marriage with her. No other possible motive for such a deed can be conceived. But he knew nothing of any such purpose on the part of the Marchese till the girl herself told him of it as they were driving together to the forest. Therefore, he had not come out prepared with a needle for the purpose of committing murder. Neither, it is true, does the theory we are considering suppose that Paolina came out prepared to do such a deed. But the weapon used is a needle. Is it more likely that a man or that a woman should have by chance such an article about them? I confess it seems to me that this circumstance alone is sufficient to turn the scale of the probabilities unmistakably."

"But that is not all," said the Commissary, laying his finger impressively on the lawyer's sleeve; "my belief is that that old friar, *padre* Fabiano, is aware of the fact that the murder was committed by Paolina Foscarelli. I am not disposed to think that

he had any hand in the doing of the deed ; but I think that he has a knowledge of her guilt. He is ill now, doubtless ; but I do not believe that he is suffering from fever and ague. He is suffering from the emotions of horror and terror. We know that he was in the Pineta much about the time at which the murder must have been committed, and very near the spot where it must have been committed. And he comes back in a state of terrible emotion and consternation. His manner in speaking to us to-day you must have observed. I have no belief in an old friar being so terribly impressed by the mere sight of a dead body."

"That is all true," said the lawyer, nodding his head up and down several times ; "and the circumstances do seem to point to the probability of your conclusion ; but——"

"But why, you will say, should the old man, if he has a merely innocent knowledge of that which I suspect him to know, refuse to tell the whole truth simply as he knows it ? I will tell you why not. In the first place, if you had had as much experience of monks, and friars, and nuns, as I have, you would know that it is next to impossible to induce them ever to give information to justice of any facts which it is

possible for them to conceal. It seems to them, I fancy, like recognizing a lay authority in a manner they don't like. They will communicate nothing to you if they can help it."

"Yes, that's true. I know that is the nature of them," assented the lawyer.

"Then, observe, this Father Fabiano is a Venetian, a fellow-citizen of the girl. • You know how the Venetians hold together. You may feel quite sure that if he did know her to be guilty of a crime, he would screen her to the utmost of his power. Of course I have not done with him yet. *Tutt' altro*. We must have an account of that morning stroll in the Pineta from the old gentleman's own lips. Meantime, I do not think that we need consider our trip to-day to have been altogether thrown away."

"Very far from it. Very far from it, indeed. Honestly, I think that you have hit the nail on the head, Signor Pietro. There is nothing like the practical experience of you gentlemen of the police, who pass your lives in playing at who-is-the-sharpest with the most astute of human beings."

"And beating them at their own game," said the Commissary, self-complacently. "If that murder

was not committed by Paolina Foscarelli, I will give you or anybody else leave to call me a block-head."

And therewith Signor Fortini and his companion drove under the old archway of the Porta Nuova and entered the city.

BOOK VI.

PŒNA PEDE CLAUDO.

CHAPTER I.

SIGNOR FORTINI RECEIVES THE SIGNORA STENO IN HIS STUDIO.

It was the end of the first week in Lent; and all Ravenna was still busily engaged in talking, thinking, and speculating on the mysterious crime that had been committed on Ash Wednesday morning in the Pineta.

The excitement on the subject, indeed, was greater now than it had been immediately after the event. For, by this time, everybody in Ravenna knew all that anybody knew on the subject; the manner, time, and place of the murder, and the different competing theories which had been started to account for it, and with the conflicting probabilities of which the judicial authorities were known to be occupying themselves.

These, as the reader knows, were three; based,

in each case, on the fact that the suspected person was known, or was supposed to be known, to have been at, or near, to the spot *where* the crime was committed at the time *when* it had been committed.

The Marchese Ludovico was indisputably known, on his own confession, to have been in the immediate neighbourhood of the spot at the time when the murder must have been done.

Paolina Foscarelli was equally indubitably, and by her own confession, not far off from the neighbourhood of the spot at the same time.

Of the Conte Leandro Lombardoni it was known only that he had passed out of the city gate leading in the same direction, at a time which might have enabled him to be present where the deed was done, at the hour when it must have been done. The evidence as to propinquity to the place was less strong in his case than in that of either of the others; but it was supplemented by the unaccountable strangeness of his passing out of the Porta Nuova towards the Pineta at such an hour, and on that particular morning.

The Marchese Ludovico stated that he went thither for the purpose of showing the Pineta to the *prima donna*, who had never seen it. And there was

nothing incredible or greatly improbable in the statement.

Paolina declared that she had gone to St. Apollinare in pursuit of her professional business. And the declaration was not only very probable in itself, but could be shown by evidence to be true. Only, while it accounted for her presence in the church of St. Apollinare, it left her departure from the church with her face turned, not towards the city, but towards the Pineta, unaccounted for.

In the case of the Conte Leandro, it was difficult to imagine the motive that could have induced him to leave the city at that hour, in the manner in which he was proved, by the testimony of the men at the gate, to have done. And he gave no assistance himself towards arriving at any satisfactory explanation of so strange a circumstance. He was unable, or unwilling to account in any way for his conduct on that Ash Wednesday morning.

“He had thought it pleasanter to take a walk that fine morning, than to go to bed after the ball.”

Nothing could be more unlike the usual known habits and tastes of the Conte Leandro, than such a freak. But supposing such a whim to have occurred to him, would he have set out on his walk evidently

intending to be disguised—with a cloak wrapped round the fantastic costume in which he had been at the ball? Was such a supposition in any wise credible, or admissible?

In each of the three cases there seemed also to be a motive for the deed that might be deemed sufficient to have led to it; and from which neither of the parties suspected could show that they were free.

In the case of the Marchese Ludovico, it was the terrible temptation of delivering his family name from ridicule and disgrace, and himself from the prospect of absolute beggary.

In the case of Paolina, it was the madness of woman's jealousy, wrought to a pitch of desperation by circumstances similar to such as had ere now produced many a similar tragedy.

In the case of the Conte Leandro, it was the cruel mortification of a man whose monstrous vanity was notorious to the whole city.

These were the three hypotheses between which the possibilities of the case seemed to lie to those whose position or means of information gave them any real knowledge of the facts. But there was a section of the outside public which had set up for itself and preferred yet a fourth theory—namely, that the *prima*

donna had committed suicide. The holders of this opinion were mainly women ; and at the head of them was the Signora Orsola Steno. In an agony of grief, indignation, and despair at the accusation brought against her adopted child, and the arrest by which it had been followed up, she loudly maintained her own conviction that the evil and wicked woman had brought her career to a fitting close by putting herself to death.

“Likely enough she may have endeavoured to entrap the Marchese Lamberto ; but not very likely,” old Orsola thought, “that that exemplary nobleman should have been caught by her wiles. Likely enough she may have plotted to play her last card, by giving the Marchese Ludovico to understand, that the only way to avoid the ruin which would fall upon him by her becoming his uncle’s wife, was to take her himself. How any such overtures would be received by the noble Marchese Ludovico, all Ravenna ought to know ; and at all events she, Orsola Steno, knew surely enough. And upon that rebuff, and utter failure of her last hope, despair had come upon the wretched creature, as well it might, and she had put an end to herself.”

To her, Orsola Steno, the case was clear : and

she only wondered that anybody could be so blind as not to see it.

But what if such a supposition were simply inconsistent with the known facts? What if it were simply impossible that any person should inflict on themselves such an injury as that which it was evident the murdered woman had sustained; and more impossible still, that they should have been able to adopt the means for concealing the wound which the assassin had adopted? What if such was the perfectly unhesitating judgment and declaration of the medical authorities?

Such people as Orsola Steno, and those who shared her opinion, are ordinarily impervious to any such reasoning. It is remarkable that, in any case of doubt or circumstances of suspicion, the popular mind—or, at all events, the Italian popular mind—is specially disposed to mistrust the medical profession. They suspect error exactly where scientific certainty is the most perfect, and deception precisely in those who have the least possible imaginable motive for deceiving. Probably it may be because the grounds and means of the knowledge they mistrust are more wholly, than in any other case, beyond the sphere of their own conceptions.

When old Orsola Steno was told that the doctors declared that it was not within the bounds of possibility that La Biancá should have put herself to death in the manner in which she had been put to death, nothing could exceed the profundity of the contempt with which she sneered in reply :

“ Ah ! they'll say anything to make out that they know more than other folks, and, maybe, they often know a deal less. Don't tell *me*. How should *they* know what a woman will do when she is driven ? I know what women are, and I know what them doctors are ; and you may believe that an old woman, who has been a young one, knows more what such an one as that Bianca can do, when she has no hope before her, than all the doctors.”

“ But it is impossible—physically impossible that she could have done it.”

“ Ta, ta, ta, ta ! Physic, indeed ; what's physic got to do with it ? I should like to physic them that try to throw suspicion on a poor innocent girl all to make out their own cleverness.”

So Signora Orsola victoriously, and to the great increase of her confidence in her own powers of insight, continued to hold her own opinion, and it was shared by many other similarly-constituted minds.

The old Venetian woman had lived a very quiet life in the strange city to which fate had brought her, making but few acquaintances, and holding but little intercourse with those few ; but now, under the terrible misfortune which had happened, she was stirred up to activity in every way in which activity was possible to her. She went to the Palazzo Castelmare and endeavoured to see the Marchese Lamberto in vain. She was told that the Marchese was ill, and could not see any one.

She went to the Contessa Violante, of whose acquaintanceship with Paolina she was aware, though she had never before seen her, and, oddly enough, the Contessa Violante was disposed to share, or to become a convert to, her own opinion respecting the mode of Bianca's death. The young Contessa was, doubtless, as ignorant of all such matters as old Orsola could be. Her education had been entirely conventual, and those who dwell in the inner sanctums and fortresses of the Church have a curiously instinctive aversion to the certainties and investigations of medical—especially of surgical—science ; and the Contessa Violante was, perhaps, hence prepared to vilipend and set at naught the dicta of the scientific authorities.

It was likely that her mind was also warped by her conceptions of what were probable, likely to be providential, and even suitable, in the case of such a person as the deceased singer. Of course, the whole life of such an one was, to the Contessa Violante, a thing abominable and accursed in the eyes of Heaven. It was more strange that all others, who led similar lives, and were engaged in such a profession, should not make an evil end of themselves than that one such should do so.

The Contessa Violante, therefore, was disposed to share the conviction of her visitor, as she most sincerely and cordially sympathised with her in her affliction. To her, also, it was wholly impossible to believe that Paolina had done this thing; nor was it credible to her that Ludovico should be guilty of such a deed. Of the three persons accused she would have found it more possible to believe in the guilt of the Conte Leandro; but, on the whole, she preferred to avoid the necessity of assuming that either of the accused were guilty by admitting the hypothesis of Signora Orsola.

“And if you will take my advice, Signora, I think that the best thing you could do would be to go to Signor Fortini, the lawyer, who is interested in the matter on

account of being the lawyer of the Castelmare family. I have always heard him spoken of as an upright and respectable man. I have heard my uncle speak well of him. If I were you I would go and talk to him; you will very easily find out where his *studio* is. Go and tell him who you are, and what your interest in the matter is, and I have no doubt but that he will receive you kindly and listen to what you have to say."

And Signora Orsola took the Contessa Violante's advice, and went directly to the lawyer's *studio* in the little cloister under the walls of the cathedral, on leaving her adviser. As Violante had said, she had no difficulty whatever in finding it.

The lawyer was at home, and Signora Orsola was at once ushered into the inner *studio*, which has been described in a former chapter.

Signor Fortini was, to all appearances, entirely unoccupied; but it is probable that his mind was fully employed in striving to see his way through some portion of the difficulties that hedged about on all sides the subject on which, more or less, all Ravenna was intent. He was sitting before his table, thickly covered with papers, but had thrown himself back in his leather-covered arm-chair, and

was grasping his stubbly chin with one hand, the elbow belonging to which rested on the arm of his chair, while the dark eyes, shining out beneath his contracted forehead, were fixed on the ceiling of the little room.

"Signora Orsola Steno," he said, as he half rose, and courteously offered his visitor a seat by the side of the table, so placed as to be fronting his own, while the sitter in it was exactly in a line between him and the window.

"*Sua Signoria mi conosce.* Your lordship knows me, then," said the old woman, whose surprise at finding herself thus recognized sufficed to put altogether out of her head all the carefully arranged opening of her interview with the lawyer which she had taken much pains to prepare.

Signor Fortini had, in truth, never seen the old woman, and had scarcely ever heard of her before the terrible event, which was now bringing her into his presence. But her name, the nature of her connection with Paolina, and very many other particulars concerning her had become known to the lawyer in the course of the investigations which that event had imposed upon him.

"Sufficiently, Signora, though I never had the

pleasure of speaking to you before, to be aware of the nature of the business which has induced you to favour me with this visit," replied the lawyer, with grave courtesy.

"Well, then, Signor Dottore, I hope you will excuse——"

"There is not the smallest need for any apology, Signora. *Anzi*—I am very glad that you should have thought it well to call on me; I shall be most happy to hear anything that you may wish to say to me."

"You are very polite, Signor Dottore, I am sure," said the old woman, hesitatingly; for she was alarmed at the idea, which the lawyer's courtesy had suggested to her cautious mind, that she might be supposed to be engaging his professional services, and might thus find herself, before she was aware of it, involved in expenses which she had no means of meeting, and no intention of incurring; "you are extremely polite, but—you see, Signor, it is best to speak plainly—I am a very poor woman; and I have not the means—and I am sure—perhaps I ought not to have troubled *sua Signoria*; but it was the Contessa Violante who advised me to come to you."

"Indeed; I am beholden to the Signora Con-

tessa Violante. As you say most judiciously, Signora, it is best to speak quite plainly. With regard to any professional services, which it might be otherwise in my power to render you, it is necessary to say at once that I am engaged in this most unhappy business on the behalf of my old client and friend the Marchese Ludovico di Castelmare. There can be no question, therefore, of any professional remuneration to me in the matter from any other quarter. Anything that may pass between us," he continued, perceiving that his visitor had not fully comprehended what he sought to convey to her, "must be of the nature of private conversation, and will not entail on you," he added, yet more plainly with a good-humoured smile, and putting his hand on her sleeve as he spoke, "any possible expense whatever."

"Thank you kindly, sir; and, truth to say, it is not so much that I wanted to ask you to say or to do anything, as only just not to say what a many people in this city are wicked enough to say and to think," said old Orsola, much re-assured, and persuaded that she was approaching the business in hand in the most cautious and clever manner imaginable.

"I hope, Signora, that I shall not say anything which it is wicked to say; but what is it that people

are wicked enough to say?" rejoined the lawyer, who knew now perfectly well what the wicked saying was.

"Why they say, Signor Dottore—some of them—some of them are wicked enough to say that that dear blessed child has—it is enough to blister one's tongue to say it—has done that dreadful thing; *Santa Maria abbia misericordia*—that murder in the forest. *O Dio mio!* Why——"

"Is she any relative of yours, Signora, the Signorina Paolina Foscarelli?" asked the lawyer, quietly.

"No relative by blood, Signor; but she is the same to me as a daughter. I took her when she was left an orphan——"

"And she has lived with you ever since?"

"Ever since she has lived with me as if she was my own, Signor; and if anybody in the world ever knew another, I know her; and, bless your heart, she isn't capable of lifting her hand against a fly, let alone a Christian. There never was such wicked nonsense talked in this world since world it was; and I'm told, Signor Dottore, that you have said that she had been the one as did this deed; and——"

“Stop, stop, my good Signora Orsola! Are you aware that you are accusing me of being guilty of punishable defamation and slander? I say that the Signorina Paolina Foscarelli committed murder? Who on earth could ever have told you so monstrous an untruth? Allow me to assure you that I never said anything of the kind.”

“Oh, Signor Dottore, I *am* so glad to hear you say so. What lies people do tell, to be sure; I am sure it was a very good thought of the Contessa Violante to tell me to come to you; and since you say that the poor child is innocent, as innocent she is, as the child unborn——”

“Stay, Signora, stay; you go too fast—somewhat too fast. Unhappily, I am by no means in a condition to say that your young friend is innocent of this crime; appearances, it must be admitted, are very much against her; we must hope that they can be explained. I accuse no one; it is not my province to do so.”

“But you don’t think the judges will believe that my child could have done such a thing? If they only knew her! You don’t think that, do you, Signor Dottore?” said the poor woman, with a voice and manner of piteous appeal.

“They will judge according to the evidence and the probabilities of the case. It is impossible to say as yet to what conclusion these may seem to point. The Marchese Ludovico is an acquaintance of yours and of the Signorina Paolina, is he not?”

“An acquaintance? why they are engaged to be married,” almost shrieked poor Signora Orsola; “has not your lordship heard that they are engaged to be married?”

“Indeed! and you are acquainted with the Contessa Violante too. Do you know whether her ladyship is aware of the engagement you speak of? I ask, because she is an old friend of the Marchese Ludovico.”

“To be sure she is aware of it. She and Paolina have often talked it over together. *Altro che*, aware of it.”

“Humph,” said the lawyer thoughtfully; and then remained silent for a minute or two, while old Orsola looked at him wistfully.

“It must be very terrible to you then, Signora, to think that the Marchese should be suspected of this shocking crime, since you have such reason to feel an interest in him,” said he at last, looking up suddenly at his companion.

"Lord bless your heart," exclaimed the old woman in reply ; "the Marchese never did nothing of the sort, no more than my poor innocent lamb did it. Nothing of the kind."

"Perhaps, then, you would not mind saying who did do it," said the lawyer ; "since you seem to know all about it."

"Why she did it herself to be sure. It is a wonder anybody should doubt it. And a like enough end for such a baggage to come to," said Signora Orsola, with much bitterness.

"You do not seem to have been among the admirers of the Signora Bianca," said the lawyer, with a furtively shrewd look at the old woman.

"Admirers, indeed ! She had too many admirers, I am thinking. A good-for-nothing, impudent, brazen—well, she has gone to her account, so I won't be the one to speak ill of her."

"You seem to have had considerable opportunities of becoming acquainted with her character, Signora Orsola. Had you much acquaintance with her ?"

"I never saw her but once in my life, and that was at the theatre on the last Sunday night of Carnival. The Marchese had given us a box."

"And it was upon that occasion then, that she impressed you so unfavorably. The Signorina Paolina I suppose was with you at the theatre?"

"Of course she was. Would it be likely, I ask you, Signor Dottore, that the Marchese took the box for *me*?"

"And no doubt the Signorina Foscarelli was impressed by the actress in the same manner that you yourself were."

"Of course she was, as any other decent young woman would have been; let alone being, as Paolina is, engaged to be married to the Marchese."

"I have no doubt, Signora, that your remarks are perfectly just. If the manners and conduct of the young women now-a-days were regulated a little more in conformity with the ideas of such persons of discretion as yourself, the world would be all the better for it. But I don't quite see how the behaviour of the *prima donna* on the stage could have had anything to do with the circumstance of the Marchese Ludovico's engagement to the Signorina Foscarelli," said the lawyer, with the most demure innocence of manner.

"You don't see it, Signor Dottore. Perhaps you were not in the theatre that night. If you had been

you would have seen it fast enough. The way she went on, when the Marchese Ludovico was a giving her a lovely nosegay of flowers—hothouse flowers, if you please—as big pretty near as this table ; not just a throwing them on to the stage the way I've seen 'em do it many a time at the Fenice ; but putting them into her hand ; and she, the minx a coming up to the box to take 'em before all the people as bold as brass."

"Ah, I see ? The Signorina Foscarelli naturally did not quite like that," said the lawyer, encouragingly.

"Like it ! Who would have liked it in her place, I ask you ? And that painted hussy a-going on the way she did ; making such eyes at him, and smiling, and a-pressing her hand to her bosom, that was just as naked as my face ; and looking for all the world as if she could have jumped right into the box, and eaten him up. Like it, indeed !"

"No doubt it was provoking enough. And your adopted daughter, Signora Steno, would not be the right-minded and well-brought-up girl I take her to be, if she did not express to you her disgust at such goings on," said the sympathizing lawyer.

"You may say that. She expressed it plain

enough ; and not to me only, but to the Marchese himself as well, when she saw him afterwards. She let him know what she thought of the painted huzzy. And she told him, too, some more of the truth. She told him that the creature knew well enough what she was doing, or trying to do. The way she looked straight up at my poor child in the box, where we were, was enough to make the blood curdle in your veins. If ever I saw a face look hatred, it was the face of that woman when she looked up at our box. She looked at the poor child as if she could have taken her heart's blood. She did. Ah ! bless your heart, *she* knew all about it. Talk of the old Marchese, indeed. Yes ; the creature had set her mind upon being Marchesa di Castelmare. Not a doubt of it ; but it was the nephew she wanted, not the uncle ; and she knew that my Paolina stood in the way of her scheming ; and Paolina knew that she knew it."

Old Orsola paused, out of breath with the length and vehemence of the tirade, which her feelings had prompted her to utter with crescendo violence. She was verbose ; but the lawyer had listened with the most perfect patience and unflagging attention to every word she had uttered.

"It is, indeed, clear enough," he said, shaking his head, "that between two women so situated with reference to each other, there could have been no very kindly feeling. And it must be confessed that this unfortunate Bianca Lalli was, by all accounts, just the sort of woman that was likely to be a very dangerous rival."

"She; a common, impudent, low-lived, brazen-faced, worn-out Jezebel. No; not where my Paolina stood on the other side. She couldn't take the Marchese away from her with all her arts. And that's why she went and put an end to herself. But she's gone—she's gone, where her painted face and her lures won't be of any more service to her. And so I won't say any evil of her. Not I. It's a good rule that tells us to speak well of the dead. *Ave, Maria gratiâ plena, ora pro nobis, nunc et in horâ mortis nostræ*," said the old woman, crossing herself and casting up her eyes in attestation of the Christian nature of her sentiments.

"Amen!" said the lawyer, piously, while he waited to see if the exuberance of his visitor's feelings would lead her to throw any further light on the state of feeling that had existed between Paolina Foscarelli and the murdered woman.

"I always say and think, for my part," continued the old woman, perceiving that her companion sat silent, as if expecting her to continue the conversation ; "I always think that the blessed Virgin knows what's best for us. Maybe it's just as well that that poor miserable creature did as she did. For we all know what men are, Signore Dottore ; and there's no saying what hold she might have got upon the Marchese."

"And no doubt that is the feeling of our young friend Signorina Foscarelli?" said the sympathetic lawyer.

"To be sure,—to be sure it is," said the old woman, meaning to credit Paolina with the piety she had understood herself to have expressed ; "she *did* take a mortal aversion and dislike to the woman, and small blame to her. But now she is gone, Paolina is no more likely to say anything against her than I am myself."

"Quite so, quite so. And I hope the magistrates may take the same view of the circumstances, that you have so judiciously expressed, Signora," said the lawyer, who was abundantly contented with the result of his interview with the Signora Steno, as it stood, and did not see any further necessity for prolonging it. "You may tell the Contessa Violante, if you

SIGNOR FORTINI RECEIVES SIGNORA STENO. 191

should see her, that I am much obliged to her for having sent you to me," he added, as he rose to open the door of his sanctum for the old lady; "Beppo, open the door for the Signora Steno. Farewell, Signora, we shall meet again."

CHAPTER II.

WAS IT PAOLINA AFTER ALL ?

ORSOLA STENO quitted the lawyer's studio as entirely contented with the result of her interview as she left him. She doubted not that she had fully impressed him with her own conviction as to the explanation of the mysterious circumstances of the singer's death ; that Paolina's innocence would be readily recognized ; and that her adopted daughter would shortly be restored to her in the Via di Sta. Eufemia.

The lawyer remained for some time seated in his chair in deep thought after his visitor had left him.

Suddenly he let his open hand fall heavily with a loud clap on the table before him, disturbing the papers on it from their places, and causing the fine blue sand, which stood in an open wooden basin for the purpose of doing the office of blotting-paper, to be

spilled in all directions by the concussion, and said aloud, "BY GOD ! THAT GIRL HAS DONE IT !"

"Ah, talk of the passions of men," he went on, in a lower muttering voice, after some further moments of meditation ; "they are nothing—they are child's play compared to the blind animal-like impulses that force a woman's will into their service when any of the master passions of the sex are touched. A woman's jealousy ; it is as plain as the sun at noonday. And we are puzzling our brains looking on this side and on that, to find a possible explanation of the facts. Talk of a tigress and her whelps ! There's a young girl who looks as innocent as a St. Agnes, and speaks as if butter would not melt in her mouth. Take—threaten to take—her lover from her, and she turns upon you like a scorpion at bay. *Furens quid fœmina possit*. Ay indeed. And they are all alike. That old woman there ; why she was ready, with all her 'Ave Marias' and 'Ora pro nobis,' to kill the woman again if she were not killed already, out of pure sympathy with the wrong done to her adopted daughter. I don't think there is a doubt about it. I should like to wager a hundred to one that the Venetian girl put her rival to death. The story is neither a new nor a strange one."

"Whether the commission of the deed can be brought home to her," he continued, after another period of musing, "that is another question; and one with which, however interesting it may be to my good friend Pietro Logarini, we need not trouble ourselves. And after all, what a good thing it is that things should have fallen out as they have. That old fool of a Marchese! It is a lesson to believe in nothing and no man, when one thinks of it. The death of that woman is the saving of the name. But, *per Bacco!* I must not say so too loudly," thought the old lawyer to himself, with a grim smile, "or I shall be doing just what the old fool of a woman has been doing. Yes, that was the last link in the chain of the evidence we wanted. She was on the spot at the time—the death-dealing weapon was essentially a woman's weapon, and the murdered woman was her feared and hated rival—and now we have direct evidence that she felt her to be such. If the judges can find any other hypothesis supported by stronger circumstantial evidence than this—why, I think that I had better go to school again."

With these thoughts in his mind, Signor Fortini determined to go and see his crony, Signor Pietro Logarini, at the Palazzo del Governo. He found that

active and able official just returned from another visit to St. Apollinare in Classe, which appeared not to have been very fruitful of result.

“ I can make nothing out of that old friar,” said the Police Commissary to his friend, as they sat in the private cabinet of the former ; “ and I am very much afraid that we shall make nothing out of him. For quiet, aggravating obstinacy and passive resistance, recommend me to a monk.”

“ What induced you to go out there to-day ? ” asked the lawyer.

“ Why, I am very strongly persuaded—I feel sure almost—that that old fellow could tell something to the purpose if he would speak. And I am more convinced of it from his manner to-day than ever. The other animal—the lay brother—I am pretty sure knows nothing about it.”

“ Is the friar about again, or still in bed ? ” said Fortini.

“ Oh, he’s in bed safe enough ; at least I found him there, shivering and shaking, and counting his beads, and answering a plain question with ‘ Ave Maria ’ and ‘ Ora pro nobis,’ and the rest of it. I don’t believe he has the fever a bit. I believe that he has been scared out of his wits by something he

has seen. But the devil wouldn't get out of him what it was if he don't choose to tell you. Oh, I know them!" said the Commissary, provoked by his fruitless excursion.

"I suppose," said the lawyer, looking doubtfully into the Commissary's face, "I suppose it is not on the cards that the old fellow was the murderer himself?"

"Ha!" said the Commissary, with a start, "that is a new idea. But no," he added, after a little consideration,— "no, that's not it; it would be very difficult even to imagine any motive. An old man, eighty years old. No, it's not that. But, if I am not very much mistaken, he knows something."

"In that case, I should have thought that means might have been found to make him speak," said the lawyer, drily.

"What means? I profess I don't know any. The devil of it is, you see, Signor Giovacchino, that it will not do to treat those fellows roughly. There would be the deuce and all to pay. There he lies, shivering, and trembling, and muttering, and going on as if he was imbecile; and swearing he is too ill to leave his bed. I don't see how we are to get him here into court."

“ Well, I’ve had better luck this morning ; and had not to go out to seek it. My witness came to me ; and I think I have got some important evidence,” said the lawyer, with much of the exultation of a successful sportsman over a less fortunate rival.

“ The deuce you have. There is a luck in those things. But if your evidence came to you——Who the devil would ever think of coming to a Commissary of Police as long as they could stay away, if they pleased.”

“ Well, my witness was not altogether a willing one ; or at least she came to me for the purpose of saying something very different from what she did say.”

“ But you did not come here merely to boast, I am sure, Signor Giovacchino. You are going to tell me what you have been able to learn, eh ?” said the Commissary.

“ Boast, no, not I ! There’s nothing to boast of. Besides, you know my interest in the matter is of a different nature from yours, Signor Pietro. All I want is to clear my friend and client, the Marchese Ludovico. You, of course, are anxious to bring the crime home to somebody.”

"True," said the Commissary, nodding his head.

"And of course, therefore, any light I can throw upon the matter, I am ready enough to bring to you, unless it were of a nature to incriminate the Marchese," returned the lawyer.

"Of course, just so. And what you have learned this morning——"

"Tell's all t'other way; I have no difficulty in allowing that, on the first blush of the matter, I felt no doubt that the Marchese was the guilty party. It only shows that one ought always to have doubts of everything. It looked so very bad. The Marchese takes the girl into the wood, comes back without her, and very shortly afterwards she is found where he left her, murdered. And he is known to have had the greatest possible interest in getting rid of her. Would it not have seemed a clear case to any one?"

"So one would have said indeed," assented the Commissary.

"Well, the Marchese had nothing to do with it. At the present moment I feel—well, hardly any doubt at all that the deed was done by the girl Paolina Foscarelli."

"That's my notion too," said the Commissary,

taking a pinch of snuff, and proffering his box to his visitor ; "but what is the new evidence."

" Well, the girl lives, it seems, with an old woman, a country-woman of hers, a certain Orsola Steno. And this morning the old lady comes to my studio for the avowed purpose of begging me not to countenance in any way the very mistaken notion that her adopted daughter had murdered the *prima donna* ; the truth being, as she was good enough to inform me, that the latter had committed suicide."

" Bah, what senseless nonsense ! " interrupted the Commissary, indignantly.

" Of course. I pointed out to the old lady that her theory was, according to the medical testimony, simply impossible ; but that naturally made not the slightest difference in her opinion of the matter. And then, aided by a little gentle assistance, she prattled on, an old fool, admitting, or insisting rather, that there had been bitter hatred and animosity between Paolina and the murdered woman ; that Paolina had conceived the bitterest jealousy of the singer ; that she was persuaded that the latter was scheming with a set purpose to lure her acknowledged lover, the Marchese, away from her ; that she was further persuaded that the singer nourished the

bitterest hatred of her, Paolina. What do you say to that, Signor Commissary? How does the land lie now, eh?" said the lawyer, triumphantly, in conclusion.

Signor Pietro nodded his head with most emphatic approbation and confirmation of his friend's opinion.

"Is not it the more likely story in every way?" pursued the lawyer; "just look at it. The Marchese is known to every man, woman, and child in Ravenna; and being known for what he is, it would be difficult to persuade anybody that he had lifted his hand to murder a defenceless and sleeping woman. But we can all of us easily understand that it is exceedingly likely that he may have so behaved as to make these two women furiously jealous of each other; at least to have made this girl Paolina, to whom, it seems, he had promised marriage, desperately furious against the other, whom she had but too good reason to suspect of having attracted the preference of the Marchese. Then look at the instrument with which the murder was accomplished,—a needle. Is it in any way likely that the Marchese Ludovico should habitually carry such a thing about with him? Is there any unlikelihood that the girl may have had

such a thing about her ; *Amico mio Pietro*," said the lawyer, in conclusion, tapping his fingers on the Commissary's coat-sleeve as he spoke, " that Venetian girl is the murderess ! The deed was done under the influence of maddening jealousy."

"How on earth could that old woman come to you with a budget of such damning facts against her friend ? Do you think she—the old woman—has any guilty knowledge of the crime ?"

"Lord bless you, no ! If she had, she would not have been so simple. No, she firmly believes her own theory of the matter, that the poor Diva killed herself. She is too firmly persuaded of it to perceive the bearing of her admissions of the hatred that existed between the two girls."

"I learned something yesterday," said the Commissary, "which all looks the same way,—not much, but in such a case every little helps. This old friar—this Padre Fabiano—is, we know, a Venetian ; and now I have ascertained that, years ago, before he came here, there was some connection of some sort—acquaintance, friendship of whatever kind you like—between him and the parents of the girl Paolina. I think it likely enough that the frate's friendship was more particularly with the girl's mother rather

than with her father,—we know what friars' ways are, and, maybe, we should not go far wrong if we imagined that the Father had reason to feel a fatherly interest of a quite special kind in the young lady. Now all this is worth only just this. Why did the frate return from the Pineta in such a state of terror, agitation, and horror? Why, supposing him to have seen, or in any way become acquainted with facts calculated to produce such an effect upon him, does he obstinately refuse to give us any information upon the subject? How will this answer fit? In the course of that walk to the Pineta, undertaken, no doubt, because the old man felt anxiety as to what was likely to follow from the probable meeting of the two girls after the scene witnessed in his presence by Paolina from the window of the church—in the course of that walk, let us suppose, the friar became acquainted with the fact that this girl—his daughter, we will say, for, in all probability, she is such—had murdered her rival. The knowledge of the fact sends him back to his cell half dead with horror and fright. His interest in Paolina ties his tongue, and frustrates all our efforts to get any explanation from him. How will that do, eh, Signor Giovacchino?"

•

“Admirably well. Clearly helps to give consistency and probability to our theory of the facts. I begin to think that all danger to my client is at an end, and, upon my word, I am more glad of it than I can tell you; it would have been a shocking thing. I am an old Ravenna man, you know, and should have felt it differently from what you would, you know.”

“True; but I am glad enough that the Marchese should be cleared in the matter, and so will the Government be—very glad.”

“I suppose there is no objection to my seeing the Marchesino?”

“Oh, certainly not the least in the world. It is a pity that he should be detained here any longer; but I am almost afraid to take the responsibility of discharging him before some formal inquiry has been made.”

“Naturally, naturally. When do you suppose you will be ready to bring the affair to a trial?”

“Oh, very soon. If there were any chance of getting that old frate into court it would be worth while to wait for him; but I am afraid that the longer we wait the worse his fever and ague will get.

But I shall have another try at him out there first."

And with that Signor Fortini passed to the chamber in which the Marchese Ludovico was confined.

CHAPTER III.

COULD IT HAVE BEEN THE AGED FRIAR ?

“SIGNOR MARCHESE,” said the old man, stretching out his hand with, for him, a very unusual degree of impulsive cordiality, “I have come to make *amende honorable*—I need hardly say how delighted I am to do so. It is not only that I think I may say there is now very little chance of any mischief falling on you in consequence of that unlucky excursion to the Pineta, but that I am able, thank God, to say that I have myself no longer the smallest suspicion that you had any hand in the crime that has been committed there.”

“Has anything been discovered, then ?” asked Ludovico, eagerly. “Ah—h—h ! that would be good news indeed,” added the young man, drawing a long breath of relief,—the evident strength of which feeling afforded a measure of the suffering he had

endured more indicative of the real state of his mind than any amount of depression which he had before allowed to be apparent.

“ Well ; enough, I think, has been discovered to relieve you of all suspicion—enough, as I said, to convince my own mind very satisfactorily that you are innocent of all complicity in the matter.”

“ I confess that I should have preferred, Signor Fortini, that my own assertion should have sufficed to produce that conviction,” replied the young man, somewhat drily.

“ My dear Signor Marchese, permit me to say that such preference would have been ill founded. Is not my conviction, based upon the probabilities of the known facts, of much greater value than any mere acquiescence with your assertions? These are matters, my dear sir, which must be looked at reasonably, and not merely sentimentally. *If you had committed murder—if I had committed murder,—should we not, either of us, have denied it as resolutely as you denied this? If the circumstances are such as to cause a man—any man—to be suspected at all, no words of his can be worth anything whatsoever on the subject; and you must admit that, the circumstances being as they were, it was impossible that the first suspicion*

should not have fallen on you. You may believe that no efforts or activity have been wanting on my part for the discovery of the means of removing this suspicion. Let us be thankful that they have, to a very great degree, been successful."

"And what has been found out? For God's sake tell me all about it! I declare, for my own part, I could almost believe that I had done it myself in my sleep, or in a fit of madness without knowing it, so utterly impossible does it seem to me to imagine what hand it could have been that did the deed."

"Signor Marchese, the hand that did that deed was no other than the hand of the Venetian girl, Paolina Foscarelli," said the lawyer, with deliberate and impressive slowness, emphasizing his words with extended forefinger as he uttered them.

"Phsaw! Is *that* all you have to tell me?" cried the Marchese, jumping up from his chair, and pacing the room with impatient strides. "It is an absurdity upon the face of it; I should have hoped that nobody in Ravenna would have believed it possible that I could have been guilty of such a deed; but, by Heaven, the whole city will see that it is more likely that I should have done it than Paolina! It is simply absurd."

“Signor Marchese, prepossessions, and previous notions of what might have been expected to be possible, are of no value in such a case as this against the logic of facts and circumstances. Other young women, who seemed as little likely to be capable of such a deed as this Signorina Foscarelli, have committed such—and have done it under the pressure of motives exactly similar to those which we know with certainty to have been vehemently operative in the heart of the Venetian.”

“Motives! What conceivable motive could have existed to——”

“What motive? The most powerful of all the passions that ever drove a woman to become guilty of crime—jealousy; JEALOUSY, Signor Marchese, has been the motive of this murder. Look at the facts as they stand: we *know* that this Paolina Foscarelli was in the immediate neighbourhood of the spot *where* the deed was done, and as nearly as possible at the time *when* it was done; we *know*—excuse me, Signor Marchese, for speaking very plainly; it is absolutely necessary to be plain—we *know* that this girl had great reason to feel jealous of La Bianca. Remember that she saw you and the singer driving *tête-à-tête* together in that solitary place at that unusual hour.

I leave it to your own feeling to estimate the degree of jealousy which such a sight, together with other previous circumstances, was calculated to produce in this girl's mind; but, if that be not enough, we *know*, as a matter of fact, that she had, even previously to seeing what was so calculated to drive her jealousy to a pitch of fury, expressed jealousy, animosity and hatred against the woman whom she considered as her rival. We have this in evidence—the perfectly unimpeachable evidence of the Signora Orsola Steno. Add to that, again, that the method of the murder was just such as a woman was likely to adopt, and that a man was very little likely to think of, or to have the means of, in his possession. Put all these certain facts together, Signor Marchese; and I think it will be impossible for even your mind to resist the conviction that must force itself upon every one who considers the circumstances.”

The Marchese stopped in his agitated walk to and fro across the floor of the chamber, and gazed into the lawyer's face with an expression of bewilderment and pain, which the old man met with a keen and steady glance, and a grave shake of the head. The Marchese, after encountering his eye for a few moments, struck his open hand on his forehead, and

threw himself on the chair he had left without uttering a word.

“And to you, Signor Marchese, it assuredly cannot appear strange that the circumstances I have enumerated should carry with them the conviction to other minds that Paolina Foscarelli is guilty of the murder of the singer,” continued the lawyer, speaking very slowly, and fixing the keen glance of his dark bright eyes on the working face of his companion; “to you, above all others, this cannot appear strange, since —to your own mind this suspicion first occurred.”

“What do you mean? I! Signor Fortini. What strange notion is misleading you? I don’t know what you mean!” cried the Marchese, while a look of horror gradually crept over his face.

“When the body of the murdered woman was brought into the city,—when we two stood in the gateway, and when your hand raised the sheet that covered the face of the dead, you exclaimed aloud ‘Paolina!’ What was then the thought that was in your mind? I imagined, at the time, that you recognized her in the dead woman before you. A very few minutes, however, sufficed to show that it was not Paolina, but Bianca who lay there murdered. And then, amid the horror of the first idea of your guilt,

which the nature of the circumstances rendered inevitable, I thought no more of the exclamation you had uttered. But I have not forgotten the fact. You did, on seeing Bianca dead before you, exclaim, '*Good God ! Paolina !*' What was the thought in your mind, Signor Marchese, that prompted that exclamation ? What but the sudden spontaneous rush of the conviction that it was she who had done the deed on which you were looking ?"

For a few moments the Marchese seemed too much stunned by the inference, and the appeal of the lawyer, and by the vision of the consequences, which he purposed drawing from it, to utter any reply to the demand which had been made on him.

"You mistake, Signor Fortini," he gasped out at last ; "you are in error. I cannot have made any such exclamation. I have no consciousness of anything of the kind. In any case no such monstrous idea, as you would infer from it, ever entered into my mind. You know how anxious I was about Paolina's prolonged absence. I was thinking of her ; at least, I suppose so, if, indeed, I uttered her name. I have no recollection. I don't know why I should have done so. All I know is that no such horrible and impossible suggestion ever presented itself to my

mind for an instant. If it were otherwise," continued the young man, after a few moments of painfully concentrated thought,—“if it were otherwise, why did I not suggest such a solution of the mystery when I found myself accused of the crime?”

“That, Signor Marchese, those who know you best will be least at a loss to understand,” replied the lawyer. “The motive that ruled your conduct then, is the same that rules it now. You were then unwilling, as you are now unwilling, to exculpate yourself at the cost of inculpating one who is dear to you. Your objection, I am bound to tell you, carries no weight with it. I cannot abandon that part of my case that rests upon the striking fact that your own first impression was that Paolina was guilty.”

“I utterly deny, and will continue to deny, that any such impression was ever present to my mind. I wholly refuse to avail myself of any defence based on any such supposition; on any idea at all, that Paolina Foscarelli is guilty. I know that she is as innocent of this deed as the angels in heaven. I will proclaim her innocence with my last breath. I will not accept any acquittal on the hypothesis of her guilt. I will rather avow that I did the deed myself. In one sense I did so. In one sense I *am* guilty of

her death. For it was I who took her to the place, and into the circumstances that led to her death."

"Signor Marchese, in this matter the truth of the facts is what is wanted. It is that, and that alone that the magistrates will endeavour to discover. A great many facts, as I have pointed out to you, will be before them. Mere statements, one way or the other, will have little avail. Quietly and seriously now, supposing we reject the theory of Paolina's guilt, are you able yourself to conceive any other possible explanations of the facts? Can you yourself suggest any other theory whatsoever?" said the lawyer, throwing his head on one side, and interlacing the fingers of his clasped hands in front of his person, in calm expectation of the Marchese's answer.

"There *was* another theory. I heard that the Conte Leandro had been arrested on suspicion of being the assassin. It would be very dreadful. God forbid that I should say that I suspected the Conte Lombardoni of having done this foul deed. But I cannot avoid seeing that it is a great deal more likely that he should have done it than Paolina," returned the Marchese.

"The accusation against the Conte Lombardoni has been abandoned, and he has been set at liberty,"

replied the lawyer; "there was, in fact, nothing against him, except the singular circumstance of his having gone out of the city towards the Pineta, at a very unusual hour on the morning of that same unlucky Ash Wednesday; and that he has at last thought fit to explain."

"At last?" said Ludovico.

"Yes; for a long time he utterly refused to give any explanation of the fact whatsoever; and his manner was altogether such as to strengthen the notion that it was possible that he might have been the criminal. He has told the truth at last. And it is no wonder that he was loth to tell it, for it is not much calculated to increase his popularity in the city."

"Why, what is it? I never used to think anything worse of him than that he was a fool," rejoined the Marchese.

"A fool, and a very mischievous and malicious one, as fools mostly are. What do you think took him out of the city that morning of the first day in Lent? Simply the desire to play the spy on you and the poor woman who has been killed."

"No, you don't mean it? the noxious animal!" exclaimed Ludovico, with intense disgust.

"It seems that he overheard you and the singer

make your appointment for the excursion, and that, moved by curiosity and the hope of making mischief, he determined to be beforehand with you on the road, and picking up, if he could, the means of paying off both the lady and yourself for some of the mortification your ridicule had caused him," said the lawyer.

"I could not have believed it possible ; the mean-spirited spiteful wretch ! I did not think he had it in him !" said Ludovico.

"A man is apt to be spiteful towards those who cause him to suffer greatly. And there is no suffering greater to a man as vain as the Conte Leandro than the mortification of his vanity. But his spitefulness has been punished : first, by a couple of days' imprisonment, and a fright which half killed him ; and secondly, by the sort of reception which you may suppose awaited him when he was released as the result of his explanation. I think he has had his due," added the lawyer, grimly.

"But how does his explanation exclude the possibility that he may have been the assassin after all ? Why may not the same mortified vanity that incited him to play the spy, have moved him to take deadly vengeance on the woman he hated so bitterly ? The man who was capable of the one is likely enough

to be capable of the other. He is the man who may fairly be suspected of being capable of stabbing a woman as she slept!" argued the Marchese, with intense indignation.

"No," said the lawyer, shaking his head; "depend upon it we did not let him go till it was made clear that he could have had no hand in the crime. He was able to prove beyond the possibility of a doubt, that he had returned to the city, entering it by the Porta Sisi, before the earliest time when the murder could have been committed. No; that notion has to be abandoned."

"And no other idea has been started?—no suspicion? Have the investigations of the police led to nothing?" asked Ludovico, with profound discouragement.

The lawyer shook his head. "I have told you," he said, "how the case stands, Signor Marchese. An idea was started at one moment that the old friar at St. Apollinare might have been the man. Strangely enough he also was in or near the Pineta much about the same time. But the total absence of all assignable motive—an infirm octogenarian; no, that is not it. But the truth is, Signor Marchese, that our inquiries with reference to this Padre

Fabiano have brought to light facts which tend to make the case stronger against the girl Paolina Foscarelli."

"I tell you, Signor Fortini, that the notion of her guilt is more entirely preposterous than any other possible imagination. I have told you that I would, rather than accept it, avow myself the murderer;—ay, and think that I had done it too, and forgotten it," said the Marchese, with extreme vehemence.

"But, Signor Marchese," returned the lawyer, with imperturbable calmness, "it matters nothing to the result, whether you will accept the idea of the Venetian girl's guilt or not, seeing that you will not be called upon to pronounce judgment in the case. The fact is, that every reasonable consideration points to that conclusion. I wish with all my heart, that the criminal was one in whom you were less interested." The meaning of which phrase in Signor Fortini's mouth, probably was, that he wished the Marchese felt less interest in her who was the criminal. "But I was about to tell you that the police have become acquainted with the fact, that this Padre Fabiano, who is a Venetian, was formerly very closely connected in some way with the family

of Paolina Foscarelli. It seems very probable that he was, in fact, her father. Now he followed her to the forest, and returned thence in a state of great and painful agitation, which all mention of the subject renews and increases; and further, the old man obstinately refuses to give any account or explanation of his walk to the forest. The conclusion which has suggested itself to the police authorities — not at all an unnatural or unreasonable one—is that the old man has been cognizant of the deed done by the girl.”

The Marchese seemed struck by this statement, and remained in silent thought for a few minutes.

“Paolina,” he said, at length, “had motives of hatred against the woman who has been killed, the friar had motives for feeling strong interest in Paolina. Why may it not be conceivable that he may have adopted her cause to the extent of committing a crime with the view of righting what may have seemed to him to be her wrongs? The explanation may seem a not very probable one; but no possible or conceivable explanation of the terrible fact is a probable one, and, certainly, it is more likely that the old friar should have done the deed than the young girl.”

"Humph!" said the lawyer, after spending some minutes of deep thought on the idea the Marchese had put forward; "I am not quite so sure that it *is* more likely. However, the theory is a plausible one, and deserves attention. Depend upon it, we shall not lose sight of the old gentleman, let him shiver and shake as much as he may; and now, Signor Marchese, I must go to your uncle," said the lawyer, rising.

"How does he bear up under all this misery?"

"Not well, not well. I cannot say that it has fared well with him during these days; but I have some comfort in store for him. I think I may venture to assure him that there is no need to imagine that his name has been disgraced by the commission of a crime, or that there is any danger that such should continue to be believed to be the case, either by the magistrates or by anybody else. You will come out of this dreadful business scatheless, Signor Marchese, I thank God for it?"

"I will not come out scatheless at the cost of Paolina's condemnation," said the Marchese, doggedly.

"But the Marchese Lamberto, you see," continued the lawyer, without taking any notice of his

companion's interruption,—“the Marchese Lamberto has been hit from more sides than one. The most unfortunate and lamentable fascination that this woman seems to have exercised over him—the deplorable fact that he should have proposed marriage to her, and that this fact should be universally known,—it is impossible that he should not have suffered, and still suffer terribly. Honestly, I cannot say that I think he will ever altogether get over it—he will never be the same man again. Would to God that fatal woman had never come near Ravenna ! ”

“Many thanks for your visit, Signor Fortini, and for all the kindness you have shown me since this sad misfortune befell. Tell my uncle how much I have felt and feel for him. *Addio*, Signor Fortini. If anything new should turn up you will not fail to let me know it? Think of what I said about the friar ; and mind, once more, and once for all, I will not come scatheless, as you say, out of this business and leave Paolina to be held guilty.”

“*Addio*, Signor Marchese.”

CHAPTER IV.

WHAT RAVENNA THOUGHT OF IT.

SIGNOR FORTINI had rather mitigated than exaggerated the truth in speaking to the Marchese Ludovico of his uncle's state of mind. During all these days his condition was truly deplorable. He had never, in all this time, left the Palazzo, and had scarcely left his own chamber. He absolutely refused to see anybody save Signor Fortini. He could not sleep by night, or remain at rest in the same place for half-an-hour together during the day.

Of course he could attend to none of the numerous duties—mostly labours of benevolence—that usually occupied his time. His servants thought that he was losing his reason ; yet, in the midst of all the terrible distress that was weighing him down, the usual kindness and considerate benevolence of his nature and habitual conduct had shone out. The only one thing that he had given any attention to

was the gratification of the wishes, and the promotion of the welfare, of an old servant.

Niccolò, the old groom who was mentioned, as the reader may, perhaps, remember, on the occasion of a certain conversation which Lawyer Fortini had with him, as having been all his life in the service of the Marchese, and of his father before him, was getting, as he had himself remarked to the lawyer, almost too old for his work. He had always hitherto absolutely refused, with the masterful obstinacy of an old favourite, all proposals of retirement; but, on the next morning but one after the fatal Ash-Wednesday, while the Marchese had been in such a state of painful agitation that he could hardly bear to be addressed by his own servant, he had, to the great surprise of all the household, sent for old Niccolò, who had remained with him more than an hour.

On coming out from the interview the old groom said that he had himself asked for the audience his master had given him; but it did not seem at all clear to the other servants when or how he could have done so. He said that he had spoken to his master on the subject long before; and how kind and good it was of the Marchese to think of his old servant's affairs in all his trouble. His master had

arranged for him, he said, what he had long wished for, though it seemed to all the household that old Niccolò had always rejected any proposal of the sort. He was to have a pension, and go to live with a niece of his who was married in Rome.

It was odd that none of his fellow-servants had ever heard anything of any such niece. But old Niccolò was not a man of a communicative turn; and perhaps nothing had ever chanced to lead him to speak of her. Now he was to join her at once; he was to start for Faenza that very afternoon, so as to catch there the diligence from Bologna to Rome.

But why such a sudden start? Why should he go off and leave them all, at a few hours' notice.

Well, the fact was, that the day after the morrow was his niece's birthday. And he thought he should like to give her the joyful surprise of seeing her old uncle and learning the new arrangements on that day. And his dear thoughtful master, who was always so kind to everybody, had entered into his scheme, and so arranged it.

And so it was; old Niccolò was gone to Rome as he had said. But he had given nobody any address by which to find him in the Eternal City. And a little jealousy, perhaps, was felt at the good fortune which

had thus befallen one out of several who would have liked the same. But all admitted that it was a remarkable proof of the thoughtful kindness of the Marchese in the midst of his own troubles.

And how terribly those troubles pressed on him was evident to the whole household; and, by means of their reports, to the entire city. Everybody in Ravenna knew with how heavy a hand affliction had fallen upon the Marchese Lamberto. And everybody talked of it. Sympathizing pity and blame were mingled in the judgments which were being passed on the Marchese every hour, and in every place where men or women met; and the proportions in which they were mingled differed greatly. None, however, could fail to see and to admit that the fall from the high pinnacle, on which the Marchese had stood, had been a very terrible one. It was felt that it was a fall from which he could never, under any circumstances, entirely recover.

The women were, for the most part, more indulgent to him than the men. As for the unfortunate Bianca, they held that a righteous and deserved judgment had fallen upon her, in which the operation of the finger of Providence was distinctly visible. To be sure it was a signal

warning to all men, as to the evils which might be expected to flow from any sipping of the Circean cup which such creatures proffered to their lips. But what fate could be too bad for the Siren herself? To think of the audacity, the shameless effrontery of such an one in daring to spread her lures, and wind her enchantments around such a man as the Marchese di Castelmare. Of course he, poor man, could not but feel her death as a terrible shock. What he had set his heart on had been violently and awfully taken away from him. And how true it is that the blessed Saints know what is most truly for our good! But what is all that to the dreadful accusation hanging over the Marchese Ludovico? A Castelmare in the prison of Ravenna under accusation of murder! And if it really *were* the case, that the unfortunate young man, driven by the prospect of being hurled down from his position and robbed of his inheritance, had done this deed, how great, how terrible, must be the remorse of the Marchese Lamberto!

It was curiously characteristic of the moral nature and habits of thought of the people, that the Marchese Ludovico, even on the hypothesis that he had committed the murder, was very leniently judged for his share in the tragedy.

The men were more inclined to bear hard on the Marchese Lamberto. An old fool ! at his time of life, to offer marriage to such a woman as La Bianca. To disgrace his name ; to cover himself with ridicule ; and, above all, and worst of all, to behave with such infamous injustice to his nephew. Nevertheless the tragedy was so shocking and so complete, that even those who were disposed to condemn his conduct the most severely, could not but feel compassion for so crushing a weight of misfortune.

As the opinion, however, began to gain ground in the city, that the Marchesino Ludovico had, after all, not been the author of the murder ; that the first impression, however clearly the circumstances seemed, at the first blush of the thing, to point to it, was a mistaken one ; and that the far more probable opinion was that the Venetian girl, Paolina Foscarelli, was the murderess, and jealousy the incentive to her crime, the compassion for the Marchese Lamberto became proportionably less. The feeling was rather, that as far as he was concerned he had got nothing worse than what he richly deserved. And who should say that all was not upon the whole for the best as it had pleased heaven to cause it to fall out ?

The Marchese Lamberto was saved, despite his own folly, from a disgraceful and degrading marriage ; and Ludovico was saved from the ruin which threatened him.

Nor, muttered the more cynical, was that all the good that was involved in what, at first sight, seemed so great a misfortune. Ludovico, too, was prevented from doing a foolish thing. It was a very different matter in his case from that of his uncle : he would be doing no wrong to any heir ; and he was at that time of life when men do fall in love, and are excusable if they are led by it into doing foolish things ; not to mention that, after all, the marriage he had proposed to make was a very different one from such a monstrous alliance as the Marchese Lamberto had meditated.

But still was it not a great blessing that the Marchesino should be prevented from throwing himself away in that manner ? The first match in Ravenna to be carried off by an obscure and plebeian Venetian artist. Truly it was all for the best as it was.

In their different degree these two stranger women were both noxious, dangerous, and had done more mischief in Ravenna than the lives of either of

them were worth. And if Providence had in its wisdom decreed that they should mutually counteract and abolish each other—why it would behove them to see in it a signal instance of the overruling wisdom of Heaven.

In the meantime, however, while every imaginable variety and modification of the above ideas and opinions were forming the staple of every conversation in every street, house, café, and piazza of Ravenna, the two men, whose conduct was thus canvassed, were assuredly suffering no light measure of retribution for aught that they had done amiss.

To Ludovico the tidings which reached him of the favourable turn matters were taking as to the probability of his having himself to answer for the murder of the singer, were neutralized in any effect they might otherwise have had of bringing him happiness, by the fact that he was exculpated only in exact proportion to the increasing probability that Paolina might be held guilty of the crime.

If, in truth, he carried in his own bosom the consciousness of his own guilt, it may easily be imagined how horrible to him would appear the prospect of escaping from the consequences of it by such means. And if that were, indeed, the dreadful

truth, the repeated declarations which he had made to Signor Fortini to the effect that, rather than see Paolina condemned as guilty, he would confess himself to be the murderer, would in no wise appear as mere ebullitions of his determination to save at all price the girl he loved.

But, during those days Ludovico suffered, he either bore his sufferings with much more of manly self-command than did his uncle, or else his agony was (as Signor Fortini, who saw them both, could testify) much less severe than that which seemed to be slowly dragging down the Marchese Lamberto to the grave.

The lawyer had told Ludovico that he was then going to his uncle ; and, in fact, he did so. But the old man dreaded doing so more than he could have himself believed that he could have feared any similar duty.

In truth, the condition of the Marchese Lamberto was pitiable.

He would see no one, save Fortini ; but he was most anxious for his visits—very naturally anxious to hear from day to day, and almost from hour to hour, how matters were going—whether any new circumstances had been discovered ; what change there was

in the probabilities as to the final judgment respecting the crime; and there was a restless feverishness in his anxiety, a shattered condition of the nervous system that made the lawyer seriously fear that the Marchese's reason would sink under the strain.

He had again and again urged him to allow a medical man to see him; and had once mentioned the Marchese's old friend Professor Tomosarchi. But the irritated violence with which the suffering man had rejected the proposal, had been such as to lead the lawyer to think that he should be doing more harm than good by reiterating it.

It was not surprising, indeed, that the Marchese should be utterly beaten down and vanquished by the misfortunes that had fallen upon him; they attacked him from such various and opposite sides. His love for Bianca—or, let me say (in order to satisfy readers who are wont to weigh the real meaning of words as well as those who are in the habit of taking them unexamined at their current value), his longing to possess her—was genuine and intense. The step he had determined to take gives the measure of his eagerness in the pursuit of her—of his conviction that he could not live without her; and the object of this great, this intense, this all-mastering passion

had been snatched away from him ; the unappeasable agony of such a bereavement can, perhaps, only be adequately measured by those who have felt it.

Then all the evils which, despite his shrinking from them, he had faced for the sake of gratifying this imperious passion, had fallen upon him as fatally as though the price of his facing them had been paid to him. All the loss of credit, of respect, of social station, which he had found it so dreadful to contemplate, had been incurred—and for nothing. How long and terrible had been the struggle, which of those two incompatible objects of his intense desire—Bianca, or the social position he held in the eyes of his fellow-citizens—he should sacrifice to the other; it had seemed to him so impossible to give up either that the necessity of choosing between them had almost unhinged his reason. And now he was doomed to forego them both.

Then, again, Ludovico, and the dreadful position in which he stood ! and, if he were condemned, on whose head would fall the blame of the disgrace which would thus overwhelm the family name ? If his nephew were held to be guilty of this crime, would not all the odium of having driven him to it fall on him ?

Truly there was wherewithal to bow down a stronger heart and head than those of the Marchese Lamberto.

According to Fortini's view of the matter, the tidings which he had to bring the Marchese that morning ought to have gone far to tranquillize and comfort him. Let it be shown that the heir to the Castelmare name and honours had *not* committed a terrible crime, and was *not* in danger of being convicted of it, and, in his opinion, all the worst of the evils which had fallen on the Marchese were at an end. That was the only really irreparable mischief; the city would have its laugh at the Marchese for his sensibility to the charms of such a charmer as the singer. But even that would be quenched by the startling change of the comedy into a tragedy. The Marchese had shown that he was no wiser than many another man; and it would be but a nine days' wonder; and as to the mere loss of the woman who had done all the mischief, the lawyer had no patience with the mention of it as a loss at all.

Pshaw! The one really important matter was to clear the heir of the house of all complicity in the crime of murder; and yet the lawyer had a strong feeling, from what he had already seen of the Marchese,

that the good news of which he was the bearer in that respect would not give the Marchese all the comfort that it ought to give him.

And the result of the visit to the Palazzo Castelmare, which he paid immediately after leaving the Marchesinò Ludovico in his prison, perfectly responded to his anticipations in this respect.

CHAPTER V.

"MISERRIMUS."

HE found the Marchese in a state which really seemed to threaten his life or his reason. It would scarcely be correct to say of him that he was depressed, for that phrase is hardly consistent with the feverish condition of excitement in which he was. There was evidence enough in his appearance of the presence of deep-seated and torturing misery, especially devastating in the case of men of his race, constituted as they are with nervous systems of great delicacy, and unendowed with that robustness of fibre which enables the more strongly-fashioned scions of the northern peoples to stand up against misfortune, and present a bold front to adversity.

There is no connection in the minds of this race between the repression and control of emotion and their ideal of virile dignity. Reticence is impossible

to them. The Italian man, it is true, has been often described as eminently reticent; and the northern popular conception represents him as apt to seek the attainment of his object by the concealment of it. Nor is that representation an erroneous one. But the two statements are in no wise inconsistent. The Italian man is by nature, habit, and training an adept at concealing his *thoughts*; he rarely or never seeks to conceal his *emotions*.

Whether there were thoughts in the Marchese's mind, which he had no wish or intention to disclose to his visitor, might be a matter of speculation to the latter. But he certainly made no attempt to hide the misery which was consuming him. The outward appearance of the man was eloquent enough of the disorder within. He had always been wont to be especially neat and precise in his dress; clean shaven, and with that look of bright freshness on his clear-complexioned and well-rounded cheeks, which is specially suggestive of health, happiness, and well-to-do prosperity. Now his cheeks were hollow and yellow, and grisly stubble of uncared-for beard, covered his deeply-lined jaws. He was dressed, if dressed it could be called, in a large loose chamber wrapper, the open neck of which, and of the shirt

beneath it, allowed the visitor's eye to mark that the emaciation which a few days of misery and anxiety had availed to cause, was not confined to his face only.

But yet more remarkable was the terrible state of nervous restlessness from which he was evidently suffering. He was unable to remain quiet in his easy chair even while his visitor remained with him. He would every now and then rise from it without reason, and pace the room for two or three turns with the uneasy objectless manner of a wild animal confined to a cage. Again and again he would go to the window, and gaze from it, as though looking for some expected thing or person. He spoke and behaved as if he had been most anxious for the coming of the lawyer, and yet, now he was there, he seemed scarcely able to command his attention sufficiently to take interest in the tidings Signor Fortini brought him.

"Thank God, Signor Marchese, the news I bring is good. Thank God, I am able to express to you my conscientious opinion that the Marchese Ludovico had no more to do with the murder of this unfortunate woman than I had. And such is now the general opinion throughout the city."

"Is there anything new? Has any—any—dis-

covery been made?" said the Marchese, and his teeth chattered in his head as he spoke.

"Nothing that I can quite call a discovery," returned the lawyer; "but small circumstances in such a case as this, when carefully put together, form a clue, which rarely fails, when one has enough of them, to lead up to the desired truth."

"Ah!—small circumstances, as you say—yes—but circumstances—eh?—do they not often—must we not be very careful—eh?" and the Marchese shook as he spoke, till the lawyer really began to think that he must be labouring under an attack of the same illness that had seized on father Fabiano.

"Fortunately, Signor Marchese, the circumstances all point, in the present instance, in the direction we would wish. That is," added the lawyer, hastily, "God forbid that I should wish such a crime to be brought home to any human being, but in the interests of truth and justice; and of course our first object is that the Marchese Ludovico should be cleared."

"Of course, of course. Why naturally, you know —But—in what direction—eh?—do the suspicions—that is, the opinions—you, yourself, Signor Giovacchino—who do you think now could have

done the deed?" said the Marchese, finishing his sentence with an apparent effort.

"My notion is," said the lawyer, speaking strongly and distinctly, "that the murder was committed by the Venetian girl, Paolina Foscarelli. You are aware of the circumstances that first directed suspicion towards her. Alone they are very strong; but some other little matters have come out. She has now been examined several times; and the account she gives of the hours that passed between the time she left the church of St. Apollinare, and the time when she was first seen afterwards is a very lame and unsatisfactory one. Then, my friend, Signor Logarini, of the police, who has been most praiseworthily active in the matter, has discovered that the old friar, who has the charge of the Basilica, and who is a Venetian, was connected with the parents of this girl, which renders it extremely probable that he may wish to screen her; and that fact, taken in conjunction with the very strong reasons we have to think that the friar has some knowledge of the deed, and his very manifest reluctance to tell what he knows, seems to point in the same direction."

"The friar at St. Apollinare," said the Marchese, with blue trembling lips, as he looked keenly into

the lawyer's face; "why it is impossible that he could know anything about it. The friar——"

"Impossible? why impossible, Signor Marchese? We know that he was in the Pineta much about the time the deed must have been done."

The Marchese threw himself back in his deep easy chair, and covered his face with his hand. The lawyer paused, and shook his head as he looked at him.

"The friar in the Pineta!" he exclaimed, getting up from his chair after a minute or two, and taking a few disorderly steps across the room.

"You see, Signor Giovacchino," he continued, returning to his seat, "I have been so shaken by all the misery I have gone through, and all the sleepless nights I have passed, that—that—that I am hardly in a fit state to appreciate the value of the—the facts you lay before me. I have been trying to think—I am afraid—very much afraid for my own part that no weight is to be attributed to any testimony which may be got from the friar of St. Apollinare."

"Why so, Signor Marchese?" asked the lawyer, shortly.

"I know the old man very well. I have often talked with him. He is not in his right mind:

certainly not in such a state of mind as would justify the magistrates in paying any attention to his statements," said the Marchese, in a more decided manner than he had before spoken.

"I spoke with the old man at some length the other day, and I cannot say that that was my impression at all. In my opinion he was quite enough in his senses to know how to withhold the information which, I suspect, he could give us if he would. May I ask, Signor Marchese, how long it is since you have spoken with him?"

"Oh! a long time. How could I speak to him, you know. I do not suppose he often comes into the city. And it is ever so long—a year or more—since I was out at St. Apollinare, as far as I can remember," said the Marchese, with a rapid sidelong glance at the lawyer; "but I am convinced the old man is not in his right mind," he added, not without some vehemence; "and it is dangerous to put any faith, or to build at all upon anything that such a person may say. Why, he is always seeing visions; and what is such an one's account worth of anything he may fancy himself to have seen."

"Well, Signor Marchese, the tribunal will form its own opinion upon that point. For my own part, I

cannot help feeling glad of any scrap of evidence which tends to corroborate the opinion that the Marchese Ludovico has been erroneously and precipitately accused."

" Of course, Signor Giovacchino, of course. *A chi lo dite !* And I am truly obliged to you for coming to me with the news you have given me. But you can understand, perhaps—in part, Signor Giovacchino, in part—not altogether—what I have gone through in these days. My mind has been shaken—sadly shaken, *amico mio*. I shall never recover it—never," said the Marchese, letting his head fall on his bosom.

" Nay, Signor Marchese. I would fain hope it is not so bad as all that. Let this business of the trial be over, and the Marchese Ludovico, as I doubt not, entirely cleared and absolved, and all will yet go well. The rest is matter of sorrow which time may be trusted to heal."

" The trial ! Ay, the trial. When—eh ?—when is it likely to come off, Signor Giovacchino. Yes, as you say, it would be a good thing if that were over," said the Marchese, with a manner that indicated a high state of nervous irritability.

" It won't be long ; there is little or no hope of

any further light being thrown on the matter ; some day next week, I should say ; I don't think they will be longer than that ; and the sooner the better—only that I am afraid you may find the ordeal a disagreeable one.”

“ Who ? I ? Why should I—— ? That is, of course, on Ludovico's account——”

“ Excuse me, Signor Marchese ; but you must feel, surely, that it will be absolutely necessary for you to be present in court.”

“ I ? I be present ? Why, don't you see that I am unable to leave my chamber—shall probably never leave it again ; how can I be present in court ? It is out of the question.”

“ Your lordship will pardon me, Signor Marchese, if I point out to you that it is quite indispensable that you should appear in court on the occasion of the trial,” returned the lawyer, firmly. “ Your own excellent judgment, and sense of what is fitting and due to your own position, will, I am sure, put this matter in an unmistakeable light before you. Think a little what the inferences, the remarks, the suggestions would be to which your absence on such an occasion would give rise ; not to mention that it can hardly be doubted that the tribunal will think it

necessary to examine your lordship respecting certain points——”

“Me? What can I tell? What can it be necessary to examine me for? I know absolutely nothing; it is impossible that I should know anything of the matter; besides, I am too ill to leave my chamber.”

“Of course, if Tomosarchi were, after visiting you by direction of the tribunal, to certify that you were not in a fit state——”

“I won’t see Tomosarchi; no testimony can be needed to the fact that I am in no condition to leave the house; I tell you, Signor Fortini, I will not see him; I cannot see anybody.”

“I fear, Signor Marchese, that it would be impossible in any other way to avoid complying with the request of the tribunal for your presence. Besides that, it would be far better, in every point of view, that you should show yourself in the court. The fact of your absence on such an occasion could not but be unpleasantly remarked on,” urged the lawyer.

“Why? What can *I* be wanted for? What can *I* tell them? It is very evident that I am, and must needs be, utterly ignorant of the whole matter,” returned the Marchese.

“There are various points on which the magistrates will, doubtless, wish for the information which your lordship can give them, although you may have no means of throwing any light on the main facts of the assassination. They will wish, for instance, to ask respecting the circumstances of the Marchese Ludovico's expedition to the Pineta. The police, you must remember, Signor Marchese, are already aware that you were cognizant of the Marchese Ludovico's intention of taking La Lalli to the Pineta. That has been ascertained from the admission of the Conte Leandro——”

“A thousand curses on the Conte Leandro!” exclaimed the Marchese.

“His figure in the matter is a deplorable one, truly; but you can understand, Signor Marchese, that the court will desire to ask some questions of you on this head—nothing that you can have any difficulty in answering or any objection to answer; but I am sure you will see, on consideration, that it would have a very bad effect for your lordship to show the least desire to avoid being present.”

“It will be most distasteful to me—very painful, indeed—I don't think it ought to be required of me under all the circumstances,” pleaded the unhappy man.

"Unpleasant it will be, doubtless; the whole affair has not been a pleasant one for anybody concerned in it, Signor Marchese — for any one in Ravenna, I may say. But you may depend upon it that it will be the wish of the court and of everybody present to make it as little painful to you as possible. And it is my very serious and very urgent advice to you to make the necessary exertion, and not to express to any one either the intention or the wish to absent yourself."

And then the lawyer took his leave — not surprised that the Marchese, broken down and in the state in which he saw him, should feel it very disagreeable to face his fellow citizens on the occasion of the trial; but, perhaps, having some other thoughts in his mind besides those he expressed as to the ill effect likely to be produced by any refusal of the Marchese to make his appearance in the court.

CHAPTER VI.

THE TRIAL.

THE police authorities were longer in preparing their case than Signor Fortini had anticipated they would be ; but at length it was known throughout the city that the day for the trial had been fixed. It was to take place on a Monday morning towards the latter part of Lent.

It had been rumoured in the city that the delay had been occasioned by hopes which the authorities had conceived that the female prisoner would be induced to make confession of the crime. The imprisonment and the repeated interrogatories she had undergone had produced a great effect upon her. She had become downcast to a very much greater degree than she had been in the days immediately following her arrest. She was very silent, refraining even from the earnest and frequent protestations of

her innocence, which, during the early days of her imprisonment, she had seized every opportunity of making. She passed many hours apparently plunged in deep introspective thought; she wept much, and passed much of her time in prayer.

And the judgment of the experienced people about her led them to interpret these manifestations as signs of an approaching confession. When at length the day for the trial was fixed, it was reported that Paolina Foscarelli had confessed. But the criminal authorities keep the secrets of their prison house in such matters; and nothing certain was known upon the subject.

The very general impression, however, throughout the city was that, whether she confessed or not, she was the real criminal, and that such would be declared by the tribunal to be the case. And such a solution of the mystery was readily accepted by the Ravenna world as the most satisfactory that under the unhappy circumstances could be arrived at.

The disgrace that rested on the city in consequence of the perpetration of so foul a crime, and on such a victim, had been felt throughout the city to a degree, that can be duly appreciated only by those, who are acquainted with the strength and the

exclusiveness of Italian municipal patriotism. And it was a matter of general congratulation that the perpetrator of it should turn out to be no Ravennate citizen, but an unknown stranger from Venice. It would have been dreadful indeed if such a deed should have been brought home to the door of a scion of the oldest and most distinguished noble family in Ravenna. Of course everybody had all along known, and had said from the beginning, that whatever might turn out to be the truth, this at least was impossible and altogether out of the question.

To many minds the guilt of the Venetian girl seemed so clear that it appeared altogether superfluous to spend time and trouble in bringing her to confess it. Her hatred of the victim she had confessed; and the confession of it was in evidence. The motive for that hatred was perfectly well known and understood. It was a motive that many a time ere now had led to similar deeds. She was close at hand when the crime must have been committed. She could give no satisfactory account of her reasons for going thither, or of the occupation of her time during the hours, which must have comprised the moment of the assassination. And the manner of

the murder rendered it infinitely probable that it must have been the deed of a female. What more could be wanted? It was rarely that a murder had ever been brought home to the murderer by circumstantial evidence of a more conclusive and irresistible character.

Signor Fortini was among those who thought and reasoned thus. But in the several interviews which he had had with the Marchese Ludovico, he had not judged it judicious to enlarge to him on this part of the subject. While assuring him that he might make himself perfectly easy, and that his innocence in the matter would beyond all doubt be fully recognised, he had preferred to lead him to imagine that the result of the trial would be altogether negative; that it would be found that no case that would warrant a conviction could be made out against any party.

Signor Logarini had meanwhile made one or two more excursions to the Basilica of St. Apollinare. But he had gained nothing by his pains. The padre Fabiano was on each occasion found in bed, no whit better to all appearance than he had been on that day when the police Commissary and Signor Fortini visited him together. Nor had Signor Logarini's

persevering cross-examinations availed to obtain anything more from the aged friar than repetitions of his first statements. Nevertheless the Commissary was confirmed more than ever in his opinion that the friar knew something; if he could only be made to speak. Still it had been determined not to attempt to bring the old man by force before the tribunal. There was every reason to think that nothing would be obtained from him in addition to what he had already said. In all probability he was really ill, more or less, as Signor Logarini said; and living under the government of the Holy Father, it was necessary to treat ecclesiastical personages with a greater degree of consideration than might have been accorded to such under similar circumstances on the other side of the frontier between the territory of the church and Austria.

Despite the friar's illness, however, Fra Simone, the lay brother, had once or twice been observed lately in Ravenna. He was seen sauntering through the streets with his long linen wallet over his shoulder, stopping at a corner for a little gossip here, and receiving a contribution to the store in his bag from some friar-loving devout old woman there. There was nothing remarkable in such a sight in

the streets of Ravenna in any way. Only Fra Simone was very rarely seen there. And when Signor Pietro Logarini, without whose knowledge scarcely a cat stirred abroad in Ravenna, was told of the circumstance, he said to himself that the Padre Fabiano was interested in knowing what people said and thought of the coming trial.

Signor Fortini had in the meantime, not without infinite difficulty succeeded in persuading the Marchese that he must bring himself to submit to the ordeal of being present in the court on the occasion of the trial. The Marchese's extreme dislike to appearing thus publicly had been in no degree overcome or diminished. And it was only the lawyer's positive and repeated declaration, that he would assuredly be sent for, if he did not spontaneously present himself, that had availed to induce him to say at length that he would go.

Every possible attention, the lawyer had assured him, would be paid to him, and everything done to make his attendance as little disagreeable to him as possible. Of course, as Fortini urged, it was well known through the city how dreadfully he must have been affected by the sad circumstances that had happened—people would be prepared to see him

looking ill and changed. Curious? Yes, of course people were curious—it was impossible to prevent them from being so; but he, Fortini, would take care that their curiosity should not be manifested in any way that could be offensive to the Marchese.

Thus, an unwilling consent to attend the sitting of the court on the morning of the trial had been forced from the unhappy Marchese,—from him who, so few weeks ago before the fatal coming of the fascinating singer to Ravenna, had been the happiest, the most prosperous, and the most secure of men; and it had been arranged that Signor Fortini should, on that morning, call for him at the Palazzo and accompany him to the tribunal.

When the morning came it seemed to Signor Fortini as if he should have to do all his work over again. He found the Marchese up and dressed. He had not shaved himself, however, declaring, with abundant appearance of truth, that, in the state he then was, it was utterly beyond his power to do so, and he absolutely refused to allow it to be done for him; and the effect of the stubbly grisled beard of a week's growth or so on the hollow lantern jaws, which all the city had been accustomed to see clean shaved, and plump, and florid with health, was such

as to render him barely recognizable as the same man by the eyes that had known him all his life. It seemed, too, to the lawyer that the shocking change which had taken place in him was even more painfully marked by his attempt to dress himself in his usual manner than it had been in his chamber wrapper. His clothes, which were wont to fit so well, and set off to advantage his well-made and stalwart figure, hung about him in bags and pantaloons-like folds, a world too wide for his shrunken form.

On the first entrance of the lawyer he protested that the effort was altogether beyond his strength,—that it was impossible for him to go through the ordeal. Did they want him to die before their eyes on the benches of the court?

A renewed suggestion by Fortini to the effect that the only means by which the necessity could be avoided would be by a certificate from the medical authority trusted in such matters by the court—his own old friend the Professor Tomosarchi, produced only a reiterated and violent declaration that he would not receive any visit from the Professor.

Eventually, the strong representations made by the lawyer of the much greater unpleasantness, and

the very much to be deprecated effect, of entering the court as an unwilling witness in forced obedience to a mandate from the tribunal, decided the wretched Marchese to allow himself to be led down to the carriage.

Even as he came, bent and shaking, down the great staircase of the Palazzo leaning on Fortini's arm, and had to pass, in crossing the hall to the carriage, all the servants of his household, most of whom had not seen him since the evening of the last day of Carnival, and who were urged by curiosity to take this opportunity of looking at their terribly-changed master, it seemed to him that his martyrdom had commenced.

He passed through the streets of the city with the blinds of the carriage drawn down, and with his eyes closed as he lay thrown back into the corner of it: but, as he felt it draw up at the entrance to the "prefettura," he suddenly grasped the lawyer's hand, and Fortini felt, with a shudder, that his hand was as cold as that of a corpse. He was altogether in such a state that Signor Fortini began to fear that there really would be some catastrophe in the court before the business of the day could be concluded.

With the aid of a servant on one side and of the

lawyer on the other, however, he was got out of the carriage, and, almost supporting him, the lawyer, who had made all his arrangements previously, led him into the building by a private door and to the chamber in which the tribunal was sitting by a private passage used only by the magistrates, and opening into the court in the immediate vicinity of the seats occupied by them, by the side of which a chair had been assigned to the Marchese.

Nor had Signor Fortini's cares and preparations ended there. He had spoken with each one of the magistrates who were to try the case, in no wise telling them of the Marchese's unwillingness to appear, but representing the terrible state of mental and bodily prostration to which the dreadful nature of the late events had very naturally reduced him, and which would have rendered it utterly impossible for him to appear in court, but for his indomitable will, and the high sense of duty, which had led him to think it, under the circumstances his duty to do so.

To no soul had he whispered a word of the Marchese's very marked reluctance to attend at the trial, save to his old and intimate friend of many years standing, the Professor Tomosarchi, whom he had thought it advisable to consult as to the desirability

of his seeing the Marchese before he was called on to make the effort. To his surprise he had found Tomosarchi almost as unwilling to see the Marchese, as the Marchese had been to see him. He did not say at once, as the latter had done, that he would not see him. But while admitting the strong desirability that the Marchese should be present at the trial, he yet manifested a strong reluctance, which the lawyer could not understand, to taking any share in the task of persuading and preparing him to do so.

The magistrates, who were all of them old friends of Signor Fortini, and to each of whom he had spoken separately on the subject, had seemed to find no difficulty in understanding, that it was very natural under all the circumstances, that the Marchese should have been terribly affected, both in body and mind, by the late events. It had been suggested to them by the lawyer, that it would be well to avoid, as far as possible, anything that should make it necessary for the Marchese to speak at all, even in saluting him on his entrance. When therefore, just after the court had assembled, the Marchese, trembling and shivering in every limb, was led in by the little door that opened close behind the seat he was to occupy, the magistrates contented themselves with rising and

bowing to him in silence. The court, as might have been expected, was very full ; and it was impossible to prevent a very marked and audible manifestation of the shock produced upon the spectators by the changed appearance of one so well known to them from running through the crowd.

Even in the territories of the Pope, a criminal court is in these days an open and public one. There is no jury, and the criminal, or suspected person, may be subjected to any amount of examination on oath. But, in other respects, the method of procedure is not very dissimilar from our own. The prosecution is conducted by an officer analogous to our attorney-general, or by his substitute ; and is defended by any advocate of the court whom he may employ for the purpose. The appreciation of the credibility of testimony, the greater or lesser value of circumstantial evidence, the application and interpretation of the law, and the award of sentence, remain with the judges, subject to appeal to a higher court. Moreover, in the present case, the inquiry assumed more of the form of a general attempt to ascertain the solution of an unexplained mystery, than would have been compatible with the forms of our criminal courts ; inasmuch as there were two prisoners to be

tried for the crime, whom no theory of the circumstances had suggested to be accomplices, and the conviction of either of whom, according to the hypothesis which had been started, involved the absolution of the other.

The judicial oath is administered not as with us, but by requiring the accused person, or the witness, to assert that he is speaking the truth, while placing the extended hand on a carved representation of the crucified Redeemer. And there can be no doubt that this ceremony has a very strong effect on the imagination and nervous system among the easily moved races of the south. Many a crime has been avowed, because the paralyzed lips of the criminal were absolutely incapable of pronouncing the lie he fully purposed to speak, while he thus openly appealed to the material figure which had the power of enabling the sluggish southern imagination to realize the presence of the Creator.

There would be little interest in detailing at length the proceedings of the trial; since nothing was elicited that would be in any way new to the reader, or that was calculated to throw any fresh light on the circumstances to be inquired into, until the business in hand was nearly concluded.

Every tenderness had been shown to the misfortunes and to the terrible state of suffering of the Marchese. A full statement of his own conduct at the ball, and on the following morning, had been extracted, with very little indulgence in the process, from the Conte Leandro, from whose white and pasty face the perspiration had rained beyond the power of any handkerchief to control it, while he described himself as an eavesdropper, an informer, and a spy. And all that had been required from the Marchese Lamberto was the admission that the Conte Leandro's statements, as far as regarded what had taken place at the ball, were correct.

But the fact was that the case was well-nigh prejudged before the professed trial began. All Ravenna, including the police authorities, who had investigated the matter, and the judges who came into court well instructed in all that had been done, and all that could be known upon the subject, had made up their minds that the stranger girl was and must have been the criminal. It was infinitely more agreeable to everybody concerned to suppose that such should be the case rather than that such a damning blot should fall on the noblest house in the city, and that in the person of one of the most popular men in

it; and, at the same time, it must be owned that the case was so strong against Paolina that a prejudice against her could hardly be called a corrupt one.

Her own conduct during the trial had tended yet farther to impress the minds of all present against her. Not that there was anything in her appearance and manner that was otherwise than calculated to conciliate pity and favourable opinion. Her entrance into the court had excited the greatest interest. She had on a black silk dress made in the simplest and plainest possible fashion; and the colour of it, where the neckband encircled her slender throat, made an absolutely startling contrast with the utterly colourless whiteness of her skin. Her manner was very subdued, very quiet; nor did she exhibit any signs of fear; or much of emotion, save to those who were near enough to her to perceive a quiet, silent, and undemonstrative tear steal occasionally down her dead-white cheek.

But when examined as to her disposal of herself after leaving the church of Apollinare—as to her motives for changing her purpose, if it were true, as she stated, that she did change her purpose of entering the Pineta—she became embarrassed and failed to give any satisfactory reply.

Ludovico had, at an early stage of the proceedings, been removed from the court, after having been in vain again and again requested by the judges to abstain from interfering with the progress of the case against Paolina.

At last, when almost everybody in the court had made up their minds that there could, in truth, be no doubt that the young Venetian, goaded to frenzy by her jealousy, had been the author of the murder, and quite everybody was convinced that such would be the decision of the judges, the latter were on the point of retiring from the court to confer, and consider their sentence, more as a matter of form, probably, than anything else, when an incident occurred that made a change in the aspect of matters.

CHAPTER VII.

THE FRIAR'S TESTIMONY.

IN a criminal trial in the states of His Holiness the Pope, there is none of that absolute and inflexible adherence to certain rigid forms and rules which gives to many of the proceedings of our courts that character of an inevitable destiny-like march which is so dramatic in its operations—that sense of the presence there of a power greater than that of the greatest of the men concerned in the administration of it, which constitutes one large element in an Englishman's respect for the law. At times this automatic power, which has been thus created Faust-like, by reason of the impossibility of pre-adapting its mechanism to the exigences of every case, works to unforeseen and undesired ends—sometimes even to absurd ones. And, with thinkers of a certain phase of modern thought, it has been a favourite taunt

against the average British mind, that it rather delights in the contemplation of such abnormal workings of the great automatic law machine, which it has created. Some manifest mistake or error has occurred. The man supposed to be murdered walks into court; but it is a minute too late; the verdict has been given—the sentence pronounced. All the court—judges, witnesses, counsel—look at each other in dismay; the great law automaton cannot be made to swerve in its path by any power there. And the average Englishman likes the contemplation of such a case, it is sneered; and the sneer may be joined in by those who, under other systems, have the immediate power of setting any such mistakes right by a word. But the sneer, let the Englishman be assured, would by no means be joined in by the population, who are subject to the action of courts and judges thus able by superior word to direct the course of justice.

The new incident which suddenly arose to change all the aspects of the trial and its results would, as far as the analogy of the Roman mode of proceeding and our own holds good, have been too late in one of our courts to produce the results which it did produce. The judges were on the point of

retiring to consider their decision and sentence when they were met at the little private door, by which they were about to leave the court, by one of the ushers. And the consequence of the few words he spoke to them was that they gave an order—turned back, and resumed their places.

It might well have been that the new incident might have been prevented from bringing about the result it was calculated to bring about in the Ravenna Court; but the miscarriage would have been caused in an altogether different way from that which has been spoken as sometimes characterising our own courts.

It was very clear to everybody present that the judges would pronounce Paolina to be guilty of the crime they were investigating; and to everybody present, with one or two exceptions, this was a very agreeable and satisfactory winding-up of the unhappy affair. Ravenna would be able to wash her hands of the matter. It was wholly, both in conception and execution, the work of a stranger. Since so great a misfortune *had* happened, it could not be more satisfactorily accounted for.

It is probable enough, therefore, that any Tom, Jack, or Harry, who, at that conjuncture, had

presented himself at the prefettura for the avowed purpose of bringing a new light to the solution of the mystery which had been already so satisfactorily solved, might have experienced considerable difficulty in obtaining for himself any access to, or hearing from, the judges.

But the person who had now thus presented himself at the prefettura of Ravenna belonged to a body, the very lowest and poorest members of which, in that country, can always find, somehow or other, some means of compassing almost any object which is not disapproved by some superior member of their own corporation. The new-comer was a friar—old Father Fabiano, the priest of St. Apollinare, as the reader may have conjectured.

The police agents had been anxious to produce him there, as the reader knows, and he had baffled their wishes. Now the result which it had been desired that he should contribute to had been brought about, or as good as brought about, without him. What did he want there now?

There was an old usher about the court, however, whose advancing years were beginning to make him disagreeably conscious that the time was at hand when a sentence to a long term of purgatory—to say

nothing of any severer doom—might make it exceedingly desirable to him to stand well with all those who are understood to have influence with the government in the world beyond the grave; and, if there had been no such person, the friar would have known somebody—some old or young woman, probably—or he would have known some other friar who knew some such, who would have been able to influence son, brother, lover, or husband, in the way he wished. As it was, Father Fabiano had no difficulty at all in conveying the message he wished to communicate to the judges.

They turned back to their places in the court, to the surprise and sudden awakening of new interest in the audience, and ordered that the new witness who had presented himself should be admitted and heard.

And Father Fabiano, bowed with age, and his hoary head bent down on his breast, but neither shivering nor shaking, advanced to the witness'-table. The crucifix was lying on it, and the friar, with the manner of a man recognizing in a new employment tools which he is well used to, at once stretched out his emaciated and claw-like hand, and made oath that he was about to speak the truth.

The Procuratore of the court then began to

examine the old man with reference to his knowledge of the circumstances connected with the visit of Paolina Foscarelli to the church of St. Apollinare, and her disposal of herself after leaving it; but the friar replied that it would be uselessly occupying the time of the court to enter into any such particulars, inasmuch as he had come thither to prove that Paolina had nothing whatever to do with the crime.

"But," remarked the Procuratore, "if it is in your power to do that, why did you not give the necessary information to the Commissary of Police when you were, on several occasions, examined at St. Apollinare?"

"*Signori miei*," said the old man, addressing himself to the court in general, "it is no affair of mine to meddle with the administration of human justice. No words that I could say could undo the deed, or bring the murdered woman back to life. Evil enough had been done. Why should I cause further trouble, and sorrow, and shame, to others? It was more fitting to one of my order to leave retribution in the hands of Him who can best award it, and whose mercy may touch the heart of the sinner with repentance."

"But if so, *frate mio*," rejoined the Procuratore,

“what, pray, is the motive that now brings you here ?”

“Surely, the determination that the innocent shall not suffer for the guilty. It seemed to me that it would never be known, save to Him who knows the secrets of all hearts, what hand had done that terrible deed ; but now I know that the fallibility of all human judgment has led *questi Signori* to the conclusion that the girl Paolina is guilty, and her condemnation would be a misfortune greater than the first—I knowing the hand which did that deed.”

“Ha, you know the murderer ; you suppose you know him ? You come to offer us your guess,—your suggestion ?”

“I come, *Signori miei*, with pain and sorrow and great reluctance, to save you from condemning an innocent person by naming him who is guilty.”

A sort of buzz and almost shiver of interest, anxiety, and expectation ran through the court, as the old friar spoke the above words in a stronger voice than that in which he had yet spoken.

“Friar,” said the Procuratore solemnly and severely ; “it is my duty, before you speak, to warn you to take heed to what you say. You are about, you say, to make an accusation the most

tremendous that one man can bring against another. Bethink you whether you are able to substantiate what you are about to utter. Remember that, if you *cannot* substantiate it, it would be an hundred-fold better that your suspicion should remain unuttered."

The Procuratore, as well as every one else in the court, had little or no doubt that the friar was about to accuse the Marchese Ludovico as the perpetrator of the murder. And some, among whom were Signor Fortini, and Signor Logarini the Commissary of Police, were persuaded that the old man was going to trump up some story in the hope of saving his countrywoman, Paolina.

"Were it not for the necessity of protecting the innocent, Signori, God knows how much I should prefer to carry my terrible secret with me to the grave. *Signori miei*, these eyes saw the deed done, that put the sleeping woman to death. Only God and I, the lowest of his servants! God and I saw the Marchese Lamberto di Castelmare do that deed!"

A loud indignant murmur of incredulity was beginning to rise throughout the crowded court, like the first getting up of a storm wind.

But it was suddenly hushed, and turned into a

spasm of horror and intense shock, that made every man hold his breath, when the sound of a sudden heavy fall was heard; and it was seen that the Marchese Lamberto had fallen insensible to the ground.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE TRUTH !

THE Professor Tomosarchi was in the court, and had been, as it happened, though unseen by the Marchese, fixing his eyes on him at the moment when the catastrophe narrated in the last chapter occurred. Springing forwards, therefore, the medical man was in a moment by the side of his old friend.

If, according to the strict letter of the requirements of their duty, the magistrates or the police authorities present ought, under the circumstances, to have prevented the free departure of the accused man to his own home, it did not occur to any one to do so. Professor Tomosarchi and Fortini between them, got him, still insensible, to his carriage, and took him to his home.

“Is it more than a mere fainting fit ?” said the lawyer, as they both were supporting the person of



the insensible Marchese. "Could you not do something to restore consciousness? Can that old friar have spoken the truth?"

"Apoplexy," said the Professor, with a serious and almost scared look into the other's eyes. "Apoplexy, and no mistake about it. Don't you hear the stertorous breathing. No, nothing can be attempted till we get him home. We shall be at the *palazzo* in a minute. We shall see; but I doubt—I doubt!"

"You mean that his *life* is in danger?" asked the lawyer.

"In danger! I have hardly any hope that he will ever return to consciousness or speak another word again."

"Good God! you don't mean that," cried the lawyer, much shocked.

"Indeed I do; it is possible, but very improbable that he should rally sufficiently to survive the attack," replied the Professor.

"Perhaps," rejoined the lawyer, gravely and sadly after a few moments of silence; "perhaps it would be best so. I fear me—I much fear me, that this can hardly be looked on but as the confirmation of that old man's declaration."

The Professor looked hard into the lawyer's eyes, as he nodded his head, without speaking, in grave assent.

They arrived in another minute at the door of the Palazzo Castelmare. The servants ran out, and they carried him up into the chamber where, ever since that fatal Ash Wednesday morning, he had, as Fortini now well understood, been suffering a long agony of remorse, apprehension, despair, all the intensity of which it was difficult to appreciate.

Life was not yet extinct when they laid him upon his bed; and the Professor proceeded to do what the rules of his science prescribed in the all but hopeless effort to combat the attack. But the miserable man had suffered his last in this life, and every effort to bring him back to further torture was unavailing. Within half-an-hour after he had been brought back to his palace he breathed his last.

"It is all over with him," said the Professor, looking up across the bed to the lawyer standing on the other side of it; "there was no possibility of prolonging his life—happily for him, and happily for everybody connected with him, and for all of us. Who would have thought a short month ago that such a life could have so ended?"

“The 24th of March, Signor Professore, is the anniversary on which, more fervently than on any other day of the year, I thank God for all his mercies,” said the lawyer, with grim solemnity.

“I don’t understand you, Signor Dottore; what has the 24th of March to do with this?” said Tomosarchi, staring at him.

“On the 24th of March, four-and-forty years ago, the Signora Fortini departed this life, Signor Professore. But for that gracious disposition of Providence, who knows that his lot, or worse, might not have been mine? From Eve downwards, Signor Professore, from Eve downwards, it is the same story—always the same story, in one shape or another—in one shape or another.”

The Professor, who was the lawyer’s junior by some thirty years, turned away with a shrug of the shoulders, and stepped across the room to the small *escritoire* near the window. There opening, without hesitation, and with the manner of a man familiar with the place, a small concealed drawer, he called the lawyer to him.

“Just come here and look at the contents of this drawer, Signor Fortini. There is a curious meaning in them.”

Fortini went across from the bed to the *escritoire*, and the Professor took from the drawer and showed to him a small coloured drawing of a human form, with just such a mark on it as had been visible on the spot of the wound which had destroyed La Bianca's life. He showed him also, in the same secret receptacle, a long very finely tempered needle, and a small quantity of perfectly white wax.

"Good God, Professor! Were you aware of the existence of these things here?" cried the lawyer, aghast.

"I knew that they were where I have now found them some four or five months ago—towards the end of last year. You do not remember, probably, some curious details of a crime that was perpetrated a year ago or more in the island of Sardinia.* I don't know that the details were published save in the medical journals. You know how great an interest our unfortunate friend used to take in all such matters. We talked over that curious case. He doubted the possibility of causing death with so little violence, and by means which should leave so little trace behind them. I showed him how readily and easily it might be done. You may judge then, Signore Dottore, of

* Fact.

the misgivings that assailed me when I discovered how that unhappy singer had been put to death. You will understand, too, why he so absolutely refused to see me, and how little desirous I was to see him."

"But, Signor Professore—what should you have done if——?"

"If that girl had been condemned. You may guess that my state of mind has not been a pleasant one. I did not know what to do: I hoped that no conviction would have been arrived at. Of course it would have been impossible to keep silence while that poor girl suffered the penalty of the crime I had such strong reason to think was the work of another. Truly it is in all ways best as it is."

"You are taking it for granted that the tribunal will give credit to the friar's testimony; but that is not certain; nay, it is not certain—at least, we do not yet know—we have only his assertion that he saw the Marchese do the deed: With these evidences before us," continued the lawyer, "we can hardly doubt that the fact was so—— But stay—what is this?—a letter addressed to me—'*AL CHIAR^{mo} SIGNOR DOTTOR GIOVACCHINO FORTINI. To be opened only after my death, and in case my death shall happen within one year from the present time!*' Perhaps

this may render any further doubts as to the conduct we ought to pursue unnecessary. Let us see."

And Signor Fortini sat down to open and read the packet; while the Professor returned to the bed on which the dead man was lying, and occupied himself with paying the last duties to his friend's remains.

The letter was a very long one, consisting of several sheets of closely-written paper. It is unnecessary to add to these pages by giving a transcript of it, because the facts which it detailed at length are either such as the reader is already acquainted with or such as he can readily imagine for himself.

When the narrative reached the events which had occurred at the ball in the early hours of the Ash Wednesday morning, after mentioning the circumstance of the information which had been conveyed to the writer by the Conte Leandro Lombardoni as to the projected expedition to the Pineta, the Marchese went on to describe the state of mind in which he had left the Circolo. He protested that, although every smallest detail of what he did had remained stamped on his memory with a vivid clearness that would never more be obliterated, it would be unjust to judge his conduct as that of a man in the possession

of his senses. He was, he said, *mad*—*MAD*!—and carried away by a hurricane of passions altogether beyond his power to control. He had not formed any distinct intention of following his nephew and La Bianca to the Pineta till he reached his own house. He had happened to approach the Palazzo from the back, through the stable-yard; and had there found old Niccolò, the groom, up. Then the idea of waylaying the pair in the forest had occurred to him. He had ordered a horse to be saddled; and had told the groom to let no one know that he had left the palace. He then went up to his room, dismissed his valet, and locked the door, as the servant had related to Signor Fortini. Then descending to the stables, by one of those private doors and stairs so frequently to be found in old Italian palaces, and generally contrived to communicate with the principal sleeping chamber of the dwelling, he mounted his horse, and rode furiously to the Pineta, quitting the city, not by the Porta Nuova, but by the next gate towards the south. He must have reached the forest before Ludovico and Bianca had left the city. He put his steaming horse into the abandoned hovel of a watcher of the cattle on the marshes; and then skulked about the edge of the

wood in the vicinity of the road which enters it from the city.

All this time he had, as he again and again declared in the long and repetitive document in the lawyer's hands, no formed intention of any sort in his mind. All he knew was that he was mad, and suffering torments worse than any imagination had ever depicted the tortures of the damned ; the pulses were beating, and the blood was rushing in his ears and in his eyes, he wrote, in such sort that all sounds seem to him one universal buzzing, and all objects vague and uncertain, and tinged with the colour of blood.

And, in this condition, he waited and waited till almost a wild hope began to creep upon him that the Conte Leandro had lied to him.

Suddenly he saw them coming towards the edge of the wood.

With difficulty he stood upright, resting the front of his shoulder and his forehead against the trunk of a tree, from behind which he glared out, while his eyes were blasted by what he saw.

Judging more sanely than the poor Marchese was able to judge, and putting together all the circumstances and conduct and declarations of the

other parties, we may probably conclude, that though he saw enough to madden the heart and brain of a man whose mind had already been warped and distorted by jealousy, he did not see aught that could have been deemed to menace the future happiness of Paolina. No doubt La Bianca, despite her declared intention to make the Marchese Lamberto a good and true wife, had he married her, would have preferred to become Marchese di Castelmare by a marriage with his nephew. No doubt she had a liking for Ludovico of a different kind from that which she had professed to feel for his uncle. No doubt her imagination had been fired, and her heart awakened to long for such love as she had seen given to each other by Ludovico and Paolina, which she too well understood to be of a kind which, despite her good resolutions, would not be found in her union with the Marchese Lamberto. And no doubt these feelings manifested themselves in her visible manner during the conversation which followed her confession to him of the engagement between her and his uncle.

It may also be suggested to those who have never been called upon to act as Ludovico was called upon to act, under the circumstances of receiving such a communication, so communicated from such a

woman, that they would do well not to judge too severely any such parts of his behaviour under the ordeal, as may have been of a nature to produce a very deplorable effect on the jaundiced mind of his uncle, though, in reality, there was little real meaning and less serious harm in them.

Of course the unfortunate Marchese could not be expected to see or reason on what he saw in any such mood or tone. As he said in the writing he had left, what he saw as Ludovico and Bianca entered the forest, side by side, in deep and close talk, made a furious madman of him. He dodged, and watched them, as they sat down together—as they continued to talk in close confidence—till he saw her lay herself down on the bank to sleep, and saw him after awhile quit her side.

Then the devil entered into him, and ruled his hand with a whirlwind power which he could no more withstand than the chaff can withstand the tempest blast.

He came and stood over her as she lay on the turf—the beautiful, noxious creature. She had destroyed him; body, soul, and mind, she had destroyed him. And now—and now—ahi, ahi! After all he had suffered, after paying all the price he

had paid! Ah, how lovely as she lay there sleeping—placidly sleeping, she! And he was to be cheated! Her beauty, her love was to be given to another.

No, no, no, poisonous, baneful, sorceress; no, be what might, that hell should never be!

He put his hand to the breast-pocket of his coat, and took from it a small pocket-book.

If man will find evil passions, the devil will always find means. Surely there must be some shadow of truth in the old legends that tell how the fiend aids those who give themselves to him.

The Marchese had, on leaving his chamber, quickly changed the coat he had worn at the ball for a morning one. And it so happened that in that was a pocket-book which contained the articles needed for the perpetration of the murder, placed there by him one day—in times that seemed now ages ago—when he was going to ask some explanation of the facts that had interested him from Professor Tomosarchi.

Like a balefully illumining lightning gleam, the clear memory that those things were there at his hand flashed across his mind.

In another minute the deed was done.

And, in a few minutes more, the Marchese, looking the madman he felt himself to be, got off

his panting horse in his own stable-yard, threw the rein to the scared old groom, and regained his room as he had left it. Then the letter went on to speak of the terrible, the dreadful days and hours which had elapsed since that time. It was during the hours of that first morning, while it seemed to the excited mind of the Marchese that every sound that was audible in the Palazzo must herald the coming of those who had discovered the deed, that it had occurred to him to send for his lawyer and give him instructions for the preparation of his marriage contract. He would lose nothing by doing so, for the fact of his offer of marriage to the murdered woman would assuredly not be kept secret by the old man, her reputed father, and the maid-servant. And the fact of his declaring such an intention, and giving such instructions at that date, would very powerfully contribute to prevent any mind from conceiving the idea that he could have been cognizant of the death of La Bianca at the moment when he was so acting.

And in truth, as the lawyer, examining his own mind, said to himself, it had been this fact which had mainly prevented two or three little circumstances from pointing his suspicions in the direction of the truth.

CHAPTER IX.

CONCLUSION.

LITTLE more need be added to complete this story of a great singer's Carnival engagement, and the consequences that arose out of it.

The consternation, the talk, the moralizings, of the little city may be readily imagined.

Of course the written statement left by the unhappy Marchese made all further judicial inquiry unnecessary. When the hand of a mightier power than that of any earthly judge struck him down before the eyes of all that world whose good opinion he had valued so highly, in the manner that has been related, the tribunal, of course, declared the business before it to be suspended. The result made it needless ever to resume the sitting. No *recorded* evidence against the Marchese had been given in court—no record of any accusation against him remained in the

archives of it : and this was deemed to be a great point among a people who do not, by any means, hold that the law is the same “*de non apparentibus et de non existentibus*.”

Of course there was no further obstacle to the marriage, in due time, of Ludovico and Paolina. A proper interval had, of course, to be allowed to elapse before the knot was definitively tied ; but it was settled, and known to be settled by all Ravenna, and the strange and moving circumstances which had attended the young Marchese's fortunes had the effect of causing his marriage with the Venetian artist to be accepted by the “*Society*” more tolerantly than, perhaps, might otherwise have been the case. There was a sort of feeling that the whole affair was exceptional ; that the higher powers had visibly taken the management of it into their own hands ; that it was destined so to be, and must be, as such, accepted. Too much of pity, of wonder, of congratulation, and of condolence, were due from all his world to leave any space for censure on account of his marriage.

Doubtless there were explanations between them as to that hapless expedition to the Pineta ; and doubtless they were satisfactory. Assuredly Ludovico

never in his moments of most severe self-examination, sharpened, as such self-examination was, by the terrible nature of the result which had seemed to grow out of his conduct on that Ash Wednesday morning, could accuse himself of having done aught that could reasonably be held to leave at his door the responsibility of the events that had followed from it. Italian men are not apt to bring into any prominence the idea that where evil or misfortune is found there fault of some kind must exist also. They are content, for the most part, to accept the notion that all such matters are sufficiently accounted for by attributing them to "*disgrazia*"—the absence of favour, that is to say—the want of that favour at the Heavenly Court which it is on every occasion of life seen to be so necessary to successful well-being to possess at the Courts of Heaven's ecclesiastical, or lay vice-gerents.

Paolina insisted on employing a part of the time which necessarily elapsed before her marriage in completing the engagement she had undertaken, and the promise she had made to her English patron. But she found herself compelled to beg that some other specimen, chosen from among the wonderful wealth of early Christian art that remains at Ravenna, might be substituted for that in the

choir of St. Apollinare. She made the attempt to return to the scaffolding by the side of the window, but she found that her strength was unequal to the task. She could not bear to look on the prospect from that window.

By agreement with her employer, some further figures from the mosaics in San Vitale were substituted for those which had originally been selected in St. Apollinare. Her associations with the former church were of a more pleasant character ; and Paolina never visited the desolate old building "in Classe" again. When the specimens selected in lieu of those in the latter building had been completed, Paolina and her friend and protectress returned with them to Venice, where it had been arranged that they were to be delivered to the Director of the Gallery.

In the ensuing Carnival Ludovico came hither, and the marriage was there solemnized. It is not intended to insinuate that he had not often made the journey from Ravenna to Venice in the interval. More of his time was probably passed there than in his native city. From Venice the newly married couple proceeded to Rome, and it was not till three or four years later, that the Marchese and Marchesa

di Castelmare, bringing with them their two boys: Lamberto and Ludovico, and their little Violante, the most exquisite little fairy that ever was seen, returned to make the Marchese's ancestral palace, and the Marchese's ancestral city, their home.

There was one other stranger in Ravenna whose lamentations over the fate that had ever brought him thither were as loud as they were sincere. The poor old singing-master, Quinto Lalli, was left, by the death of his adopted daughter, as destitute of the means of support as desolate in his home and heart. He was not worth much; but it would be unjust to suppose of him that his violent outcry on her murderer was wholly or mainly prompted by the former consideration. There had been a real and strong affection between him and his adopted daughter, and her death in truth left him utterly desolate.

Yet he never again quitted the city he so much regretted having ever seen. His comfortable support was adequately provided for by the Marchese Ludovico. And often in after years—on summer evenings on a stone bench beneath a fig-tree in the garden of the cottage provided for him, and in winter at the chimney corner of its tiny parlour—

might be seen the tall spare nun-like figure of a grave and gentle lady, earnestly labouring at the somewhat up-hill task of consoling the old man, and striving to shape the teachings of his Bohemian life to a better lesson than he was apt to draw from them. It was the Contessa Violante; and it may be concluded from her occupation both that she succeeded in escaping the pursuit of the Duca di San Sisto, and that her great-uncle the Cardinal did *not* succeed in becoming Pope at the most recent vacancy.

After the return of the Marchese and Marchesa di Castelmare to Ravenna, however, the greater number of the hours of the Contessa Violante were spent in the home of her little god-daughter Violante di Castelmare, and of her friend Paolina.

THE END.

LONDON :
PRINTED BY SMITH, ELDER AND CO.,
OLD BAILEY, E.C.



1. The first part of the document is a list of names and titles, followed by a list of dates and times.



